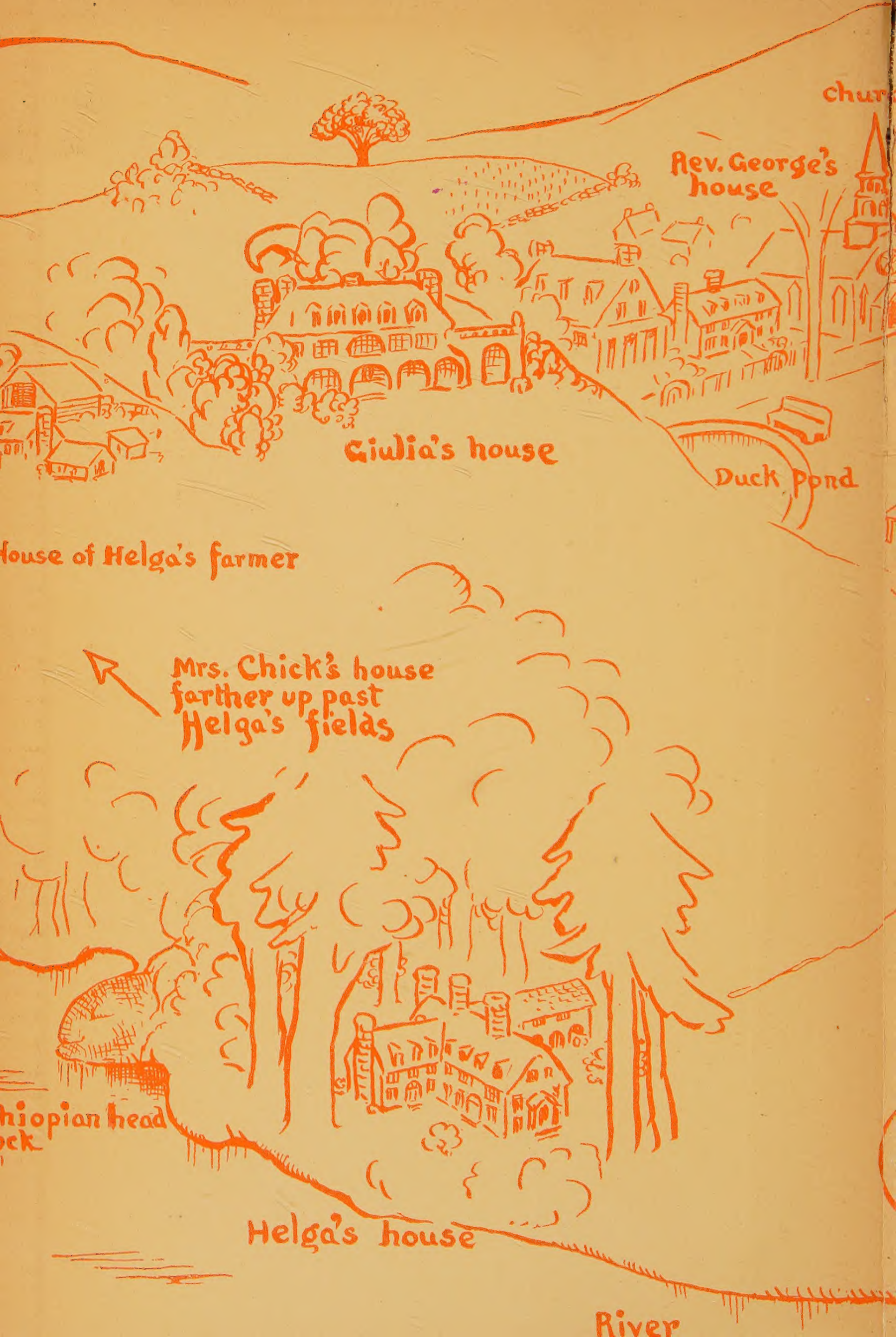
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Rev. George's house
Giulia's house
Duck Pond
louse of Helga's farmer
Mrs. Chick's house farther up past Helga's fields
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ck
Helga's house
River

Windsor's house
Grave-yard
Trees

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THE GOBLIN WOMAN

BOOKS BY
ROSE O'NEILL

GARDA

THE KEWPIES AND THE RUNAWAY BABY

THE KEWPIE PRIMER and other KEWPIE BOOKS

THE LOVES OF EDWY

THE LADY IN THE WHITE VEIL

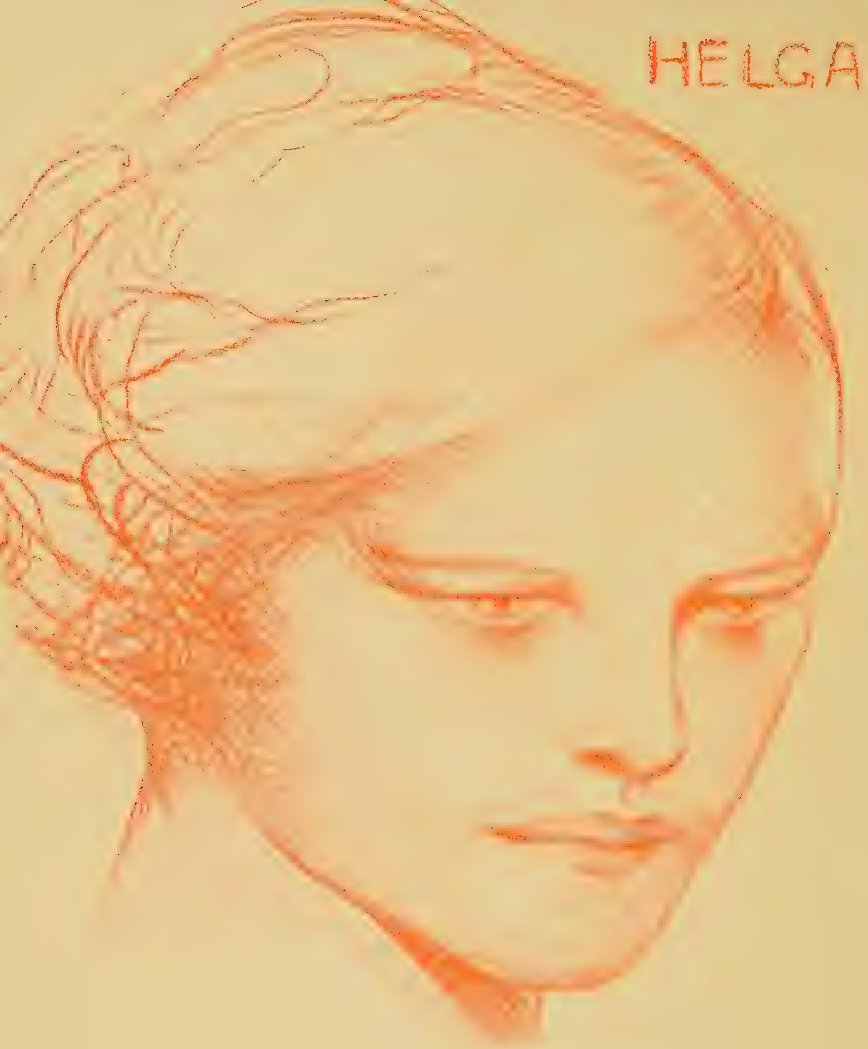
THE MASTER—MISTRESS (Poems)

THE GOBLIN WOMAN

GIULIA WINDSOR

TREDEGAR

JACKIE
ROSEMARY


HELGA

THE GOBLIN WOMAN

BY ROSE O'NEILL

With Drawings by the Author

DOUBLEDAY, DORAN & COMPANY, INC.
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FIRST EDITION

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THE GOBLIN WOMAN

PRELUDE

THIS was happening in the evening. The people of the village had gone into their houses, where the death-dark windows were coming alive, as lightsome as Lazarus.

The village lay between hills in a green cup, but well above the long gradual terraces that sloped to the broad New England river below. These suave degrees were decked out with young grass, spring flowers, and plentiful tree plumage.

Here among these gentle slopes it was already dusk, and on the farther side darkness had erased the special shapes of the cub mountains climbing the flanks of their mighty mother beyond, a lioness couched, head vigilant. But the powerful stream between still bucklered back some last desperate lances of light.

The only human creature to propel his bulk through this thickening dark was a man, youngish by his action, and at present of a more or less wandering purpose.

He had let himself out of his house on the hill that overlooked the village from the south, and though destined to dine at a house on the northern hill, had come down toward the river, the longest way about. The fast diminishing light struck surprisingly on the expanse of linen exposed by his evening dress.

He seemed to be taking his own sort of pleasure in the livid upper air which lurked before the onriding Cossacks of a storm.

Evidently this gentleman was not without a talent for taking pleasure. There was in him what a delightful person, a hundred years ago, once called "a disposition to be comforted."

His aquiline face, dimly visible, showed an enchanting smile.

He strolled past heavy-footed trees that seemed to be going the other way with some cloaked intention. A hidden bird gave a last fluted cry. He thought, "The complaint of birds that their small polished perfect grace should be short-lived. . . . No, but birds do not die. . . . It's so rare to find a dead bird that the accursed who sees it is never able to forget. . . . But these others die, and die with such damned thoroughness."

He paused beside the graveyard of the town, a walled place under thick boughs of fir. The little older slate headpieces, decorated with preposterous cherubs half erased, were all awry. On the shelves in a crumbling vault marked WINDSOR lay ancient coffins of his own race. One mouldy box inside there was burst apart, disclosing a sleeve, some rusty lace, a small beringed hand of bone.

A stranger had once asked to see this spectacle and seen the famous smile grow osseous in offence. Windsor had a talent for what might be called serene displeasure. But there was no displeasure at this moment in his serenity.

He knew well the quaint names of bygone women engraved on certain slates, now scarcely legible . . . "Remember," "Reliance," "Desire," "Wait still on the Lord"; "Here lies Delight, Obedient and Servicable Wife of Samuel Increase Windsor. She was pleasant."

He passed on down the suave terraces, the object of his walk being up, the house on the northern hill where six friends were waiting for him. He still smiled, for it was his way, as he said inwardly, leaving the graveyard behind: "So thoroughly, so damnedly dead."

He thought of the fleeting character of the houses, tombs, and temples of these people. They had set up no Doric challenggers to Time, no sentinels to guard their evanescence with grave obstinacy. No one had carved a single stone. And in the three hundred years of Aryan life in that place no poet had given his tongue to its throes nor inconsolably recorded: "Here we too lived." No one had broken his hand and heart engraving a marvel upon stern material. . . . They had not "lifted up a single stone. . . ."

Windsor was carrying through the deep dusk what had been called his look of "pained content," for taking pleasure in his notions was one of his ways. He was the playfully bookish man of the town and had been described by his now waiting host as the sort of fellow that keeps up his Latin.

He went on downward, gently swinging his right arm. The left hung at his side, for it had received a curious injury.

He halted at last, and turned to retrace his steps towards his lawful destination. Then he glanced below once more toward the wide stream, now the colour of blackened silver. He stood now above the only house built on the bank, looking down on its gabled roofs and chimneys, just discernible among enormous darkling trees.

It was called "The River House," and there was no corner in that ancient house that was safe from the sound of water. He had known it all his life, for it had belonged to his grandfather, but not its latest owner. This personage, a woman, was a recent inheritor and had taken possession only the day before.

Suddenly, for no reason, he peered down through the obscurity that lay between him and this roof.

He had become as tight and mettled as a hawk. A sensation of cold passed through his viscera as if a foot had crossed his waiting grave. And if there had been a curious eye to penetrate the shadows, his face would have looked like that of one who had seen his hangman.

Presently he turned away, shaking himself free of a slight shudder.

"Now what the devil was *that!*" he said, half aloud; then made rapidly toward the other house on the hill where his friends were waiting. He did not slacken his climb till he had crossed its lawns. There he looked up at the broad porches and lighted windows with that slight revulsion we sometimes feel when approaching friendly dwellings we frequent. He shook himself again impatiently, easing his brain of something that still floated there, cold and furtive. He smiled, "I may be fantastical, but not high fantastical."

CHAPTER I THE DINNER PARTY AND THE GOBLIN

"WELL, the goblin has come!" detonated a brisk, trig, right little, tight little, middle-aged woman to Windsor as he went into the drawing room. Mrs. Worthington always preceded the hostess in bouncing at a new arrival in her friends' houses. She burst on a guest like a bubble.

Windsor looked affection without enthusiasm, rendered homage to his hostess, Giulia Crawford, who showed no disposition to bounce, saluted her husband, Charles, nodded to his own wife, Sylvia, who had preceded him, and made obeisance to old Mr. Brewster, talking to himself by the fire. This ancient was devotedly invited by the neighbours, but being pretty deaf, his conversation was rather restricted to his usual attentive interlocutor when at home.

"What goblin?" asked Windsor.

"The Helga goblin by the river of course," resumed Mrs. Worthington. "She got ensconced in the horrible old house yesterday. The leisurely Giulia swoops on her at once—everybody else contemplating a swoop—and has bagged her for dinner here this very night as ever was."

"What does she look like, Giulia?"

"Not like anything you ever saw," returned the hostess.

"You see," said Mrs. Worthington, "there's only one left, so it will be just half as awful. The sister goblin went into a convent—or didn't go into a convent. Anyhow, she's vanished."

"Why didn't both goblins go into convents?" Windsor inquired.

"Well, this one turned atheist, and her Roman Catholic uncle liked her so much that way, he willed the old place to her, he perishing at the same time replete with Extreme Unction and reeking with the odour of sanctity."

Mrs. Worthington liked to sound a little sacrilegious when she was away from the children. It rested her.

"Old Tredegar?"

"Of course, dreary old Llewelyn. What do you think we've been talking about? And there's nothing so gloomy as a gloomy Irishman—except a gloomy Negro."

"Old Tredegar wasn't an Irishman, and he did no perishing in the odour of sanctity," said Charles Crawford, the host, beginning to administer drinks the colour of gold with the aid of a Japanese servant in his native dress.

"Tredegar's valet, Mike, turned a priest in on him at the last, but he roared so that the padre had to pray for his soul outside in the hall. He died in the midst of the roar."

"Of amber-coloured cocktails justly vain," said Windsor, taking his glass and smiling at his host with his justly celebrated smile. No one knew what he was misquoting and neither did he. . . . Oh, yes—"amber-lidded snuffbox" . . .

Charles Crawford was not exactly a fat man, but he was cumbersome. He seemed perilously large for any normal house, and the reason for his being in his own was not apparent. It was a Colonial house given over to porches, *cinque-cento* saints, Byzantine carvings and cushions. If its Puritan builder could have got a glimpse of it, he would have burned it at the stake.

There was no difficulty in observing that Giulia Crawford "went" with the house. Charles, the heavy secret-looking man, described himself as a "horned toad," but to describe what he felt about his wife would have taken the tongues of a thousand poets.

"Of course he wasn't Irish, he was worse," said Mrs. Worthington. "He was a wild Welshman."

"Why do you call old Tredegar's nieces goblins?" asked Windsor, giving his empty glass with infinite suggestion to the Japanese. That subtle being ignored infinity.

"Because they *were* goblins," returned Mrs. Worthington. "They were about ten and eleven years old when the old grouse had them last at The River House visiting. And they were the most ridiculous little team of unmistakable goblins. You should have seen their clothes! Perfectly evident no female hand had ever been laid upon them in the way of kindness. Mother dead. Father and other uncle did it all. Not a button on them. Nailed together with tremendous safety pins. . . . The father, David, and other uncle, Owen, terribly poor in New York. All three brothers had been in love with the mother. Old Tredegar never forgave brother David that got her—groused himself to death. She was Danish. Came over on same ship with wild Welshmen, and Danish father, professor of bugs, or biologist, or entomologist, mad about anything leggy. Died. Then Danish daughter died, leaving goblins."

"Where did you get all this?" Windsor was rather surprised to hear the "horned toad" inquiring in such a stern raucous tone, while he fixed Mrs. Worthington with a look decidedly horny. Oh, yes, he remembered old Llewelyn Tredegar of The River House had been associated with Charles in business. . . . Evidently he didn't much relish gossip about the old friend's affairs. The "horned toad" entertained only the most worthy sentiments.

"Got it all from you, my dear Charles," returned the right little, tight little lady. "That is, you told Giulia. . . ."

Giulia lifted her fine eyes without the faintest interest or compunction, and Charles lowered his. No one noticed that his florid face had turned slightly paler.

"But I fancy even you couldn't have told us anything about what happened after."

Mrs. Worthington's bright little eyes were directed toward the blunt mass of the host's profile, but Charles was directing the Japanese to refill Windsor's glass.

"What happened after?" asked Windsor, lifting his aromatic cup first to his fine nostrils.

"Well, the whole lot disappeared."

"Disappeared?"

"Off the face of the earth."

Charles walked ponderously to the window and looked at the ponderous clouds, but there was something about his weighty back that Mrs. Worthington thought still indicated listening.

"If you asked old Tredegar about them," she went on, "he'd say he didn't know what had become of them. He'd look as if he were going to burst—perfectly purple. From the time those two sisters were here in the capacity of goblins until now when this Helga pops up like a jack-in-the-box, no living being has ever seen hide or hair of them."

"There she is now," Giulia interrupted.

"No, it's only Mrs. Copeland."

"Without her spouse, of course. No men, no men in this unhappy town!" said Mrs. Worthington.

Mrs. Copeland came in, a large, firmly benevolent lady, rather defeated in dignity by her legs. . . . Everyone wished again that the era of short skirts might not have affected Mrs. Copeland, or that her daring might plunge her into the new era of long ones, in spite of the traditional caution of the town.

"We were talking about Mrs. Tredegar."

"Yes, I saw her drive in yesterday," said Mrs. Copeland. "She didn't look like anything you'd ever seen. True there was a birdcage on top. Enormous. With a sort of parakeet. It was certainly Mrs. Tredegar in under."

"Why doesn't she come, I wonder," said Giulia. "In ten minutes dinner will be announced and those clouds will break with a smash."

She too went to the window, and everyone watched the movements of her back as she went. The action of Giulia's back was one of the most remarkable things about her. Old Mr. Brewster blinked and thought of Rosemary, Windsor's cousin, who had married the Reverend George and had five children in the house next the church. He never could look at any woman or child without thinking of Rosemary, for, already an elderly man, he had fastened the fervour of his heart upon this neighbour's daughter when she was a little girl. He prayed silently that she might not have to have another baby. As he had no belief in a God, he did not know to what he was praying: perhaps to his own burning heart.

"I'm on tenterhooks so see what she looks like," said Windsor, yawning gently.

"Looks like! The Goblin!" resumed Mrs. Worthington. "If you could have seen them playing with the pair of goats that Michael, the uncle's valet, gave them. They looked like little Chinamen. Their mouths were like the wide bills of frightful baby birds, open all the way back to the hips. You could cut their brogue with a knife."

"What was the brogue like?"

"It wasn't like anything . . . You saw them. . . . They were all over the place."

"No, I must have been away," said Windsor, with faint regret. "I should have remembered them. I've a pretty good eye for goblins."

"Let me see just how long ago it was," said the lady, casting her birdlike circular eye to the ceiling. "Must be all of fifteen years. You were at school abroad somewhere. The atheist was the younger. Old Tredegar was going to pay for them at a nuns' school in the old country."

"Preparatory school for atheists?"

"Only one went—or didn't go. . . . But they and all their fathers and uncles vanished. All except old Llewelyn. As he said to me, in a state of bursting and bright purple, 'Just get into your crop' (them was his very words) that those people have been wiped off the face of the earth."

"I was always so frightened of that wretched old man," said Sylvia, Windsor's wife. "Once he patted my hair and burst into the most horrible tears."

She touched the pale gold of the curls that veiled her rather protuberant forehead. She was a small Dresden mantel-ornament of a woman, but a tremendous housekeeper. She had been making incessant interjections which sounded like the mew of a very small cat against the deep full-bosomed croak of Mrs. Worthington. No one ever took any notice of Sylvia, certainly not her husband.

"Precisely where did Llewelyn Tredegar come from in Wales?" asked old Mr. Brewster, who had once been quite a traveller. He had been wanting to make this inquiry for some time, so that he might talk to himself about whether he had been precisely on that very scene or not.

"Oh, some craggy place," said Giulia.

"What did she talk about when you went to see her yesterday at The River House—goats or ghosts?" Windsor turned an intimate look upon Giulia, who was pacing about the room a little *distraite*. She did not return the look, but played with the ivory triptych on a table.

"Well, she seemed to be in perfect amazement over her house. She liked the squeak in the old bare floor boards, the various steep black stairways and cupboards. She seemed not to know exactly how her uncle had come by the place. I told her he'd bought it years ago from Charles, who said he'd bought it to growl in. 'I'll growl in it too,' she said. When I remarked that she didn't look very bearish, she observed, if you please, that she was worse than a bear, she was a hyena and lived entirely upon the dead."

"How refreshingly gruesome!" said Mrs. Worthington.

"I do wish she'd come!" exclaimed Giulia. "She seems a slippery character. I'm afraid she won't, and I want her. I scarcely ever want anything. . . . She said she was going to walk, and it's going to pour cats and dogs."

"Shall I run down and pick her up?" asked Windsor, thinking how charming it would be to get away from his friends and hurtle for a few minutes through that wild air in Charles's car. He need not pick up the lady, perhaps. She might already have passed by the path.

"For heaven's sake, tell us what else she said," mewed Sylvia.

"We were looking at the tremendous old stone fireplace," resumed Giulia, "and she remarked, 'There's room for the Chimney Angel, the gecko, and the Billy Blind.' . . . When I asked her what a 'gecko' was, she said she thought it was a lizard. Then we looked at the tiny little brick chimney in the parlour, and she asked if it wouldn't be better with twisted columns resting on the backs of lions supporting a canopy with her arms and carved all over with salamanders. I told her if she did that I'd give her all my *objets*."

Giulia was tired of her *objets*. She was tired of almost everything. She would have liked now to build a different sort of house, more in accord with the spirit of modernity. Windsor's rude brother, Jackie, described this ideal house as built upon the chaste design of a grain elevator, with a granite slab for a bed, a carpenter's bench for a table, and two camp chairs made of steel. It could have one single painting on its wall representing Socratic Love in forms and colours suggesting an explosion in a bomb factory, one statue of an egg, and one drawing of a single line representing nothing at all. But in default of the ideal, Giulia rested among cushions, surrounded by her charming and despised accumulations.

"What else did Mrs. Tredegar say?" Sylvia Windsor persisted.

"Oh, is she *Mrs.* Tredegar?" put in her husband. There had been intermissions in his attention.

"Of course she is. She married her uncle," said Mrs. Worthington.

"Why, it isn't done, is it?"

"Done or not, it's just what she would be up to. Nothing was sacred to that goblin."

"I should have thought an uncle almost as sacred as a grandfather," observed Windsor.

"She married the youngest uncle, Owen. Of course, she never would have bothered to marry the old grouch by the river. He was the eldest, and her father in between. . . . I asked old Tredegar why they had ever left Wales. And he said because they were all stark mad. . . . He had to take care of the other two because they'd spent all their patrimony in riotous living—hadn't they, Charles? . . . Anyway, all three of them went on being in love with Helga's mother and growling."

"But didn't the father-brother mind the daughter-niece marrying the brother-uncle?" asked Windsor. "If there had been an aunt-nephew-grandfather, would it have minded?"

"Oh, she waited till her father and sister had disappeared. Then she snapped up her uncle." Mrs. Worthington turned to Giulia: "That's the last Charles ever told us, wasn't it? . . ."

Giulia gave a faintly regretful glance at her husband. He stood, enormous, leaning on the brocaded mantel, his eyes on the ground. Perhaps he was thinking of a time when he had been on such terms with his wife as to tell her things, whisper confidences in intimate moments that she might carelessly betray. He looked like the monument upon which Patience sat.

"Helga was only twelve years old—when she married him," pursued Mrs. Worthington. "Any kind of a father, if he'd been there, would have slapped her hands when she proposed . . . 'Naughty Goblin, mustn't marry its uncles' . . . And that was the last of them for twenty years (or fifteen, did I say?). Till, at last, all the uncles laid by in the capacity of corpses, up she pops like a rabbit from a hat. . . . Good heavens, there she is now!"

No, it was only a blast of wind against the door. They had closed it against the drift of petals and pollen from the flagellated wistaria on the porch.

"When I saw her driving in," said Mrs. Copeland, "there was a screaming red dress under the parakeet. Yet I hear she's just lately a widow."

"A scarlet widow, an atheist, a goblin in our sacred midst!" said Windsor.

All but old Mr. Brewster were now at the windows, rather tensed by the accumulating excitement of the scene outside. The lashed trees bowed and recovered. On the opposite hill, Windsor's house loomed out saffron, or disappeared as inundations of lightning were succeeded by more exaggerated darkness.

Above the river, far down to their right, there was a sheet of vermilion between the running legs of clouds. There was no other colour—all was trampled out under the sinews of the treading sky.

"When those two frightful children visited old Tredegar," continued Mrs. Worthington, "this Helga one, the atheist, said she thought our dear little place was a fairy town—that we were all fairies that had climbed up out of the river and built it with spells."

"We, fairies!" said Windsor. "You neglected to say that the goblin was mentally defective."

There was a succession of continuous flashes. A gigantic burst of flooding yellow revealed the noble landscape entire. He extended an arm and defined the sweep of the hither hills and the mountains beyond the livid river, all exalted for the moment into a supreme of strangeness.

"There isn't a single soul of us worthy to dwell in its presence," said Windsor. "How arduous we would be if we were! . . . Did I say *soul?*" . . .

"Oh, don't mind me," said Mrs. Worthington, "I never claimed to have a soul—except in the domestic circle. In the maternal situation you've simply got to have one. . . . But aren't *you,* at least, worthy of the best we have?"

"Oh, I'm a blot upon even such a scutcheon," said he serenely.

"What *is* the matter with our dear little scutcheon, Charles?" cried she to their host who was just now interrupting his wife's absorption with the unobtrusive offer of a golden drink. She declined and moved gently away.

"Why aren't we worthy of *anything?*" the right little, tight little one pursued, "and here, all along I'd been thinking we were so nice."

"We *are* nice," returned Charles, "we're just as nice as we can be, and Windsor is the nicest of the lot."

The bright disks of the little lady's eyes remained upon Crawford for an inappreciable bright instant, then swept the harmonious back of Giulia and came to rest on Windsor. "There now, you haven't even the distinction of being the blottiest. Doubtless Charles is a lot blottier in his own quiet way."

She went back to her chair, and Charles, withdrawing his glancing, secret eyes from his wife's harmonious back, followed.

"He tries to leave her so exquisitely alone," thought Mrs. Copeland. "You would say he never looked at her—yet he's always just taking his eyes away. . . . What a monkey Adelaide is!"

She sat down by Adelaide Worthington with a sigh. She always performed the acts of rising or subsiding with a sigh. She could not understand how the rest of her had grown so large while her feet remained so small. She would say, "I simply can't stand five minutes. I have such ridiculously little feet." They were the only little members she had, and she looked upon them with almost maternal tenderness.

She did not like to sit beside the diminutive Sylvia. She felt so enormous, looking down across her bosom at the fairylike creature. But Sylvia would always sit beside her when she could, feeling more fairylike. She now came and did it and felt it.

Windsor, left alone at the western window, felt the brush of a skirt against his leg. Giulia had drifted to his side.

"Don't do that."

"I just wanted to look at it one minute with you," said she.

"You can't."

"Why not?"

"Not just now."

"Don't be fantastic," she protested. "I can't scuttle off like a jack rabbit."

"Scuttle off in your own sculptured way." He lifted his voice and made a movement toward the savage sky, in its preparation for aërial war.

"It's the entire wardrobe of carnage," he said.

They stood for a moment together, their profiles seen one beyond the other, like two princes on a coin. The same blood, diluted to distant cousinhood, ran in their veins. There were few of their circle in the town who did not carry that same blood more or less "removed."

Charles was one of these. He had come up from another order and had captured Giulia by his new wealth, which dated its beginning from the financial activities of his father during the Civil War, the same date marking the decline of Giulia's family, whose fiery grandfather had spent his substance for the abolition of slaves.

Sitting now beside Mrs. Worthington, Charles gave so quick a glance at the two in the window that even her "monkey" eyes did not catch him at it. Yet he retained a perfect image of those two profiles. Each had the fine-nostrilled convex nose that is named for the eagle, the short curving upper lip which conceals the beautiful long teeth imperfectly, meeting the lower only by an effort of will, and

"The difficult sweet underlip
That speaks with pretty pain."

Giulia was darker than Windsor, yet both heads had the same general colour, touched through their brown darkness with surprising edges of sombre gold. The cropped hair made almost the same form on each nape. In the front it fell forward in a natural "bang," his too, though he gave it abusive brushings, vainly compelling it to sweep to the side and backward. They were of exactly the same age, having both been born on St. Valentine's day, thirty-three years before, on opposite hills.

The house in which they were now had belonged to Giulia's people for two hundred years, as had his to his people. But the aspect of his house had hardly changed at all, while this one, since the coming of Charles with his hoard, had suffered amplifications.

"They look for all the world like brother and sister," said the "monkey" suddenly.

"Like Orestes and Electra in the Naples Museum," remarked old Mr. Brewster, who happened to be listening and observant, having just exhausted an absorbing topic with himself. "No, that's Orpheus and Eurydice just back from Hades—looking at each other very straight and fatal looking . . . Where *did* I see that quite archaic Orestes and Electra . . . ?"

"You don't mean Scylla and Charybdis, or Flora and Fauna, or some of the other twin sisters, do you?" asked Giulietta, the fourteen-year-old daughter of the Crawfords, who just now came in with the look of a boy newly washed by force with a great deal of soap.

She was mostly composed of legs and feet. Her imperturbable little face, faintly defined breasts, and rough-surfaced downy muscular arms were merely adjuncts to these magnificent members and extremities. She "barged into" things, as Sylvia said, having learned the expression from Windsor's brother Jackie. Sylvia hated to have things barged into. Every morning she prayed to her house, "O Almighty House, vouchsafe that nothing may be tipped over in Thee this day. Keep safe in every particular, O, my Sacred House, and make Thy humble servants more careful, more worthy to serve Thee. Thine be the power and the glory," etcetera.

"Why doesn't Rosemary come?" asked old Mr. Brewster.

"They're dropping in for coffee," said Charles, "when she and the Reverend George have got the babies put to bed. Rosemary's coming to see Mrs. Tredegar, so we've been able to get her out from under the kids. Here, try another cocktail, it'll warm you."

"I don't take it to be warmed, I take it to be jolly," replied the ancient, receiving the priceless glass in his palsied hand, Sylvia watching him sternly. All vessels were sacred vessels to her, even in another woman's house.

"I can't have Rosemary caught in the rain," the ancient went on. "Surely George will think to carry an umbrella and shawl. . . . Did you ask Jackie?"

"You know Jackie Windsor can't go where Rosemary goes," broke in Mrs. Worthington, at the top of her lungs, "not without her special dispensation."

"Not just for a few minutes," he complained, "to get his *look?*"

The gaze of everybody returned to Windsor and Giulia at the window.

The hither side of their faces was gilded by the candles, while the flashes of lightning struck the side toward the window with the incandescent blue of flames. As she watched them, Giulietta gave no sign that they were her chief enthusiasm.

It was fashionable now for young girls to wear a look of immobility on such soft faces as, with their mothers, used to break continually into wistful smiles and flushes: an almost sullen immobility like that of defensive adolescent boys. The undulation of bygone little hands had turned to a fist.

Giulietta's imperturbable eyes were fastened upon her mother and her friend, still standing side by side against the furious window. The two beautifully formed mouths, which never closed over the teeth without an effort, gave the effect of a perpetual smile. His was a true smile of one alive to pleasurable sensations; hers was the unsmiling rictus of forgotten lips left apart in uncontented languor. They were talking about the storm in perfectly audible tones. The two faces whipped with peacock colours by the lightning were quiet, perfect in themselves, smiling and saturnine. You would have thought them passionless.

Charles lifted his averted eyes. The glance of Charles was that of a revolving pharos which sleeps between gleams. There was no expression whatever in his small brilliant transitory eyes as he looked at the pair. But a few minutes after, when he had left the room, Mrs. Worthington confided to Mrs. Copeland, "I've just got a new bit. My dear—*he's proud of them!*"

"Here's Rosemary and George for their coffee!" cried Giulia, turning round to the pair, who now came in, propelled by the wind. "And we haven't had a nibble! . . . Oh, my dears, you'll have to dine, again, with us. . . . We've put it off, waiting for that terrific Mrs. Tredegar."

"Delicious about Rosemary *dining!*" chirped Sylvia Windsor. "If there's a scrap or two left over in the nursery, she snaps it up like a famished lamb. . . . And as for *you,* my poor martyr . . . !" She gave both her little hands to the Reverend George Rolfe, looking up with pity into his well nourished, symmetrical, and trusting face. He drew his large kind hands away as quickly as he could. He wished he could love God's creatures without their loving him back. His handsome lusty face was chastened and refined by sharing secrets of immanent life and death with a woman in marriage.

"I'll clean the terrific Mrs. Tredegar's trencher," he said with charming boyishness, making signs of readiness to attack, expanding his fine chest. "I'll make as nought the lentils and locusts I've supped on already. How about you, Rosemary?"

"Always hungry." His wife had been laughing in a sort of crow at the state of her windswept hair in a mirror. Now she was saluting the party from under an enormous array of eyelashes and leaning against old Mr. Brewster's shoulder. "But what if the terrific Mrs. Tredegar should turn up after all and snatch our crumbs!"

"Rosemary, you look like a voracious vesper," said Windsor, leaning against the window frame, "or a ravaging romance . . . or a bloodthirsty beatitude."

"I'm a wavening wolf," she laughed in a sort of cockadoodledoo, letting old Mr. Brewster kiss her horny hand, indurated by the constant washing of baby linen and other "menial" labour.

"*Carissima manina,*" said the travelled old gentleman, "that's the way we used to do it in Italy."

There was nothing childlike about her as she said "wavening wolf" with her hardy voice.

Windsor, examining Rosemary with more attention than he had given to the examination of Giulia for years, noted the signs of care and suffering on her face chiselled to the noble bones. His attention was especially arrested because the notion that she might not live long had given him an abrupt pang. These first signs of ravage in a young woman, well known, bring the general tragedy vividly to mind. Nobody lives long, he thought next. . . . If she lives for seventy years, it won't be long. But if she should live very, very much less than long, what would Jackie, his brother do? Jackie who was not permitted to come where Rosemary and her husband were, because at sight of the latter he frothed at the mouth; Jackie, the one inhabitant of the town who battered his head against things, who would not "behave."

Rosemary Rolfe, their cousin, "once removed," born Windsor, was agreed to be in all probability the most beautiful woman in her way for many miles around. Her face retained its twilight bloom, delicately graven as it was by the experiences of mother with a highly limited income. It was a "vesper face," a face seen in the dusk.

A veil laid across this head of heavy hair and falling over breast and shoulders (making the sweet contour of a hill), would have given you a Hindu woman. But the eyes were gray in the honey-coloured twilight face, gray pools set about with thick dark reeds. From their tender setting, the daredevil eyes of maternity could have been said to swagger. From their compassionate reeds they looked out with stripped intelligence, naked and gay as a fighting man.

"I *do* think we ought to keep them up," said Mrs. Worthington, who had also been affectionately examining the generally beloved Rosemary. "We really ought to feed the Rolfes from time to time. They're the only holy things we have."

"I wouldn't go quite so far as to say the *only*," objected the reasonable Mrs. Copeland, smiling toward the Reverend George as one should say, "You see, I *can* be reasonable in spite of your merits, you blessed man, which that little idiot, Sylvia Windsor, jolly well can't." Mrs. Copeland was very active in church affairs, charities, and moralities. She "did good" in spite of her small feet. These made it fatiguing to go into as many houses as she went into. But she kept a sharp eye on the Italians and Czecho-Slovakians that had come into the town of late, and watched all Roman Catholics to see that they did not go too far.

"I meant holy without being horrid," amended Adelaide Worthington.

"We're holy *and* horrid," said Rosemary, pulling old Mr. Brewster's necktie round from under his ear and beginning to listen to Mrs. Worthington with her customary nods of acquiescent attention while she thought of other things. Mrs. Worthington repeated for her and the Reverend George the story of the Tredegar goblins, the goats, Helga's snapping up of her uncle and the disappearance of the lot, like "now you see it, now you don't."

As Giulia had come toward the newcomers, her person, fine to fragility, had been trespassed upon by that of the "barging" Giulietta. Giulia, staggering from the impetuous contact, and Giulietta steadying her with loud hearty apologies, gave each other those abysmally estranged looks of mother and daughter where there has been no intimacy.

The young girl precipitated herself upon Windsor with a shout of relief.

"Show *me* the big show," she bawled, turning him again to the window with her blacksmith's arm about his waist.

"Us too," cried Sylvia, propelling the Reverend George. "Oh, Windy, why didn't you call me? I adore sunsets and things, only I never think to look out."

"I'll leave it to you," Windsor returned, "but it's begun to pall. . . . ' 'Tis not so sweet now as it was before.' "

"Pall or no pall," said Giulietta, "you shan't budge."

"Giulia," cried Mrs. Worthington, "let's eat. Helga Tredegar never came to The River House. You saw her ghost."

"Here comes Mrs. Tredegar!" said Windsor, detaching himself from Giulietta.

The door which had been closed against the torrent of leaves and petals now flew open with a bang against the wall. A furious blast rushed in and set the curtains on the other side streaming out the windows. The last of the lingering light outside was suddenly extinguished in thick darkness. The company in the lighted room stared past the flaring candles into the black blank. There was no one there.

In the room they had not heard the large slow deliberative drops preparing for the solid assault of rain that now belaboured the spacious porch. Hissing, seething, rebounding, it swept across the threshold into the room wild gossamer of spray like that which drenches decks of ships.

But no one wished to close that door. In the brain of each was the image of a woman out there running toward them in the rain. No one but Giulia had seen her. Certainly what Mrs. Worthington had described of her appearance in childhood bore no relation to what it might be now. For them she had no face.

Yet each felt there was a running woman out there. A running woman with no history, beaten from behind by flogging rain. An ambiguity without a face. A streaming mass of running—of determination to pass that sill—with what unknown proposals?

Giulietta's round stolid phiz broke into excitement. "Gee! but she's hoofing it! Sounds as if she's got her goats with her."

The other faces, which had been lifeless with familiarity for each other, were now unmasked by the living *qui vive* of curiosity. Each advanced itself, nakedly bearing its peculiar marks, civilized, significant, and each in its mild civilized way, disastrous, acquainted with disaster.

"Well, she isn't anywhere," said a voice behind them.

The door was slammed shut, and everyone turned to Charles, who had come in at the other portal and stood in his attitude of a bison, brushing water from his dripping head. He explained that he had taken his car and run down to The River House to round up the recalcitrant guest. He mopped his neck, which was so short that his massive head seemed to be rooted on his enormous shoulders. He mopped the subdued trickling wisps of his hair. Ordinarily this light-coloured hair would lift near the crown in unconquerable spikes. When one remembered Charles it was as an uncurly bison in a reflective attitude, trying to smooth down his spikes.

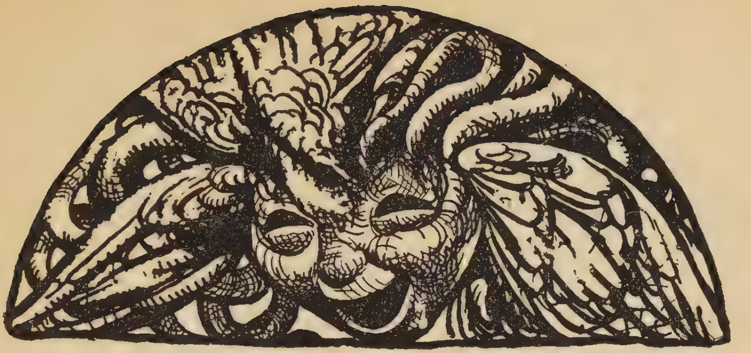
"She isn't there. She isn't along the path. . . . She isn't anywhere," he said in his low raucous tones.

"Then she's drowned in a ditch," said Giulia, "and in a starving condition, as the papers say when they pick them up."

"No, the housekeeper said she ate more heartily than usual before she went out," returned Charles. "Matilda Johnson rather conveyed the idea that she gobbled."

"The goblin gobbled!" protested Giulia. "At home! When she had given me to believe she was remarkably pleased with the notion of gobbling here!"

"Well," said Charles, sitting down and dripping on a sixteenth century chair, rather winded, as a man might be who had been scouring the bleak hillside for a guest in a tempest, "Matilda Johnson told me she mentioned that to her, but she said she was fearfully peckish because—" Charles paused—"because the supply of fresh corpses in these hard times was not equal to the demand."



CHAPTER II THE HERO IS HIGHLY DISTURBED BY THE GOBLIN

WHY did you say that to Mrs. Johnson about the supply of fresh corpses?" said Windsor.

"What would *you* say to Mrs. Johnson?" inquired Mrs. Tredegar.

"I think if I cudgelled my brains I could drum up something that wouldn't be quite that. . . . How did she look when you said it?"

Mrs. Tredegar reflected. "Not any more pleased than usual. Mrs. Johnson is not a cheerful woman."

They were standing in the parlour of The River House. They were standing, because Mrs. Tredegar had shown no disposition to sit down nor to invite her guest to do so. The river was sounding through the room and casting patines of liquid silver on the low, heavily beamed ceiling. This quivering silver was again reflected from the surfaces of old furniture, elaborately carved sofa, mahogany highboy, fiddle-back chair, cupboard with eighteenth-century china, teak table, cabinet and stool with Chinese designs such as seafaring great-grandfathers of the place had brought home, steel engravings of the Battle of Bunker Hill, of The Landing of the Pilgrim Fathers, of The Corsair, of an almost swooning lady with scarcely room in the geometrically perfect oval of her face for her abundant eyes, two little round breasts held up by a ribbon, and long ringlets. She held an object in her hand, the littlest finger curving delicately off by itself. This was entitled "Memory's Token."

There were two or three painted portraits, almost black, in crumbling oval frames, of early members of the Windsor family, for this house had belonged to that line before it had been purchased by Charles Crawford with all its appurtenances, and later sold to Llewelyn Tredegar.

Nobody had cared to rescue the almost obliterated portraits, and mahogany and teak heirlooms were too plentiful in the town to be bothered about. So this, one of the ancient seats of the Windsors, had kept its worm-gnawed souvenirs of the past to cheer the declining years of Tredegar, "the old grouch by the river."

The roughly hewn oaken beams above were fastened with wooden spikes. The floor boards were a foot wide. The floor slanted toward the exterior wall. A spool fallen from a work basket was careering down this incline. A beautiful cat of a simple breed but the colour of gold was watching its progression with eyes like wells of honey. Suddenly he sprang and tossed the spool into the air, leaping with it, his flying body joyful as a spurt of ecstatic laughter. Mrs. Tredegar addressed him as Blinko, but said his name was really Little Owen.

His grandfather, a large dreaming cat of white and gray, lay in a Windsor chair, disdaining both spool and grandson. His name, Mrs. Tredegar explained, was Little David. They had come to her with the house. Old Tredegar's valet, Mike, had told her on her first meeting these cats that the dead grouch particularly wished her to become intimate with them. The parakeet mentioned by Mrs. Copeland watched the cats with his head on one side, between the bars of a wicker cage.

Mrs. Tredegar, under the curious eyes of Windsor, was moving from board to board of the naked floor testing each with her substantial feet clad in strapped sandals that had once been white.

"When you know which are the squeaking boards," she said, "and the tricks of door knobs, the drawers that won't pull out, the cats and the cargo below decks, I think you can be called at home. I shall keep a weather eye out for all indications."

"I suppose you do know your home by these awful things," he agreed after a pause, "but perhaps even more by the books."

"Ah, the books!" she said, scrutinizing him. "I suppose now you yourself have read several books."

"Well, yes, several."

She reflected, lowering her eyes once more to the broad boards and treading to and fro as heavily as she could, apparently to produce further squeaks.

Windsor said afterwards to Giulia, "She's Doric. She's mad as a March hare, but she carries it off with Doric simplicity. Or else she's Mongolian, and she carries it off with Mongolian complexity."

Just now, he was looking at Helga Tredegar with his dispassionate power of observation. And in order to look more at his ease he sat down without the benefit of courtesy.

There was certainly a trace of the Mongolian in her face, such as is sometimes found in Scandinavians. Her Danish mother had evidently left the daughter her traits. Mrs. Tredegar was a light-coloured woman, deeply tanned as if by persistent exposure to Southern suns. The tawny of her skin seemed to pour into her hair, without impediment in the different material. She was all *fauve, leonata,* the colour of lions and of fallow deer. So much were her hair and skin of the same colour that at temples and neck the line marking the change was confused.

Her nose was short, straight . . . Doric. Her cheek bones a little too defined. Scandinavian, Celtic, Mongolian. Yet it was doubtless this kind of physiognomy which Heine called a "sweet-Swabia face." . . . Her lips a matter of special beauty, Windsor thought, the upper full, wide, gay, pagan, properly arched in the Egyptian tradition; the lower narrower, more refined, touchable, patient, Christian. There was the scarcely discernible downy shadow of a moustache. . . . The eyebrows were feathery, hardly detachable from the skin in colour, riding straight as far as the outer tips, then rising incontinently upward. Mongolian . . .

Northern eyes, made to look at snow, narrowing under the bursting gold of Southern light which the dark eye receives full on. Imbedded eyes, the upper lid hidden almost completely under a pouch, a fullness of the flesh in the space between it and the brow. Narrow, long eyes, looking out from a long, horizontal loophole, a streak of uncertain colour lurking there blank . . . at intervals emitting adumbrations of some blue stone. Imbedded eyes . . . hooded. Scar in the exact middle of the forehead as if she had been shot by an infallible aim. No expedient in the arrangement of the hair to conceal it. . . . Hair tawny, long, parted on the left side. The back of the head completely obscured by braids like a circularly woven mat.

"She is lion-coloured, skin and all," he thought. . . . Neck remarkably robust. The entire body implying through the clothes the presence of more stalwart tissues than would be expected from a first sight of its moderate girth. Hands strong, restless, soiled.

"Are you a climber of mountains?" he asked.

"I am a climber of seas."

Windsor had been examining her with careless curiosity on his own account, but more because Giulia had particularly asked him to do so. It was Giulia who was thinking about this woman more than she usually thought about people. He did not believe that he would share in her preoccupation. He was rather repelled. Still, he looked at the strange creature intently.

"You will know me again," said Mrs. Tredegar, "but it won't do you any good."

"Won't you sit down?" he asked, smiling up at her, as he was always smiling. "Then I shall feel permitted to. I hope I wasn't staring past decency. But you admit you are something to stare at."

"Oh, I wear a trophy on my thigh against eyes. A periapt. . . . But you are the thing to stare at. You are the chief spectacle of barons."

"Meaning?"

"The Prince. The barons can never look away."

Windsor gave his rich low laugh. It was as if he were savouring a succulent liquid in his throat. Mrs. Tredegar stood at some distance before him, her lips leaning meditatively on her hand.

"I suppose all the inhabitants of this village kiss you night and morning," she said. "The old to ease themselves from regret, the young to nourish their hearts with hope."

Windsor ceased his laugh. His smile could take on an aspect of pain. It did so now. His dark eyes, like agates, stiffened with offence. He got up and went toward the door.

"Why did you come here?" she asked. She had not moved, her meditative lips still leaning on her hand.

"Mrs. Crawford sent me to ask why you didn't come to her house last night, as you had agreed. But now I feel it's rather useless to make the inquiry. Good-bye."

"I did come."

"What do you mean?"

"I was in the porch," she returned.

"What the devil were you doing in the porch?"

"Looking through the window at your incomparable face."

CHAPTER III IN WHICH A LADY PURSUES THE GOBLIN, WHILE WE DISCOVER VARIOUS SECRETS OF THE HERO

Did you ask her if she had got terribly wet in the rain?" inquired Giulia, when Windsor told her of his visit to the impossible Mrs. Tredegar.

"No."

"Why not?"

"I didn't care whether she got wet or not. Or rather, I wished she had been drowned."

He had come straight to Giulia from The River House.

"She must have been having a bit of fun out of you, as she was having it out of poor Mrs. Johnson last night with her fresh laid corpses. The woman is a humorist."

"Humorist or not," he replied, "it was the most disgusting event. I hope her cats will eat her."

When he was calmer he described Mrs. Tredegar at length, the Doric, the Mongolian characteristics, the dirty hands, the inane treading of boards for squeaks, the inaner utterances. He stressed the moustache until he had her twirling it.

"She looks like a Chinaman, she behaves like a yahoo, and whoever shot her in the middle of her bean made mincemeat of her brains. I tell you, I'm mangled."

He began to laugh.

"I'm going straight to her," Giulia said, taking her ivory walking stick and Venetian shawl and going out with unusual exhilaration into the cool gold of the spring weather.

The two stood a moment on the terrace, gazing down at the roofs of The River House far below among its great trees. It looked as if it were floating in the river, from which a scarf of mist rose and encircled it.

"I wonder what she's doing there now!" said the lady.

"Whatever it is, it's something completely damned."

"Come with me," said Giulia.

"Not on your life. . . . I wish you wouldn't go. Let her bloom unseen, and above all unheard. I tell you she *is* a goblin."

Giulia began moving toward the path that led down the long terraces toward the river, an unwonted amusement lustring her dark eyes. He followed her a little way, the two aquiline kindred faces purely defined against the new-born verdure. "I swear I think you're in love with her," he said.

"Well, if I am, it can't do me much good," was her rejoinder, "since she's in love with you already, you grabber."

He made a sound of annoyance.

"As I left her," he said, "she roared after to know why you hadn't sent your husband instead of me. . . . What would she have done to poor old Charles!"

"She *has* done it," returned the lady. "He met her at the ship. He tidied her like a dirty child. He bought her a red dress because he likes red. He says now at last he's got hold of a defenceless creature to wear red for him. He sent for her to Timbuctoo, or wherever she was hibernating. Old Tredegar willed her to him with all his affairs. . . . Charles *has known all about her all the time.*"

"Then won't he tell us things?" asked Windsor. "Won't he tell us how she went cuckoo?"

"He won't give us a single solitary tip."

"Well, I'm going back now," he said. "I'll wait for you on your divan, licking my wounds. Your perfume among the cushions will be healing me."

They scarcely glanced at each other. They were incapable of compelling a ruddy glance one from the other, sunk as they were in the irretrievable kind of insensibility of those who consort across a finished passion.

"*Au revoir,*" he said, "but I feel you will never be seen again by mortal man."

He began to retrace his steps toward Giulia's house, then stopped and stood looking back, not to observe the remarkable symmetry of her action as Giulia went down the long slopes, but because he now suddenly felt a slight inexplicable anxiety for that dear creature going down the far declining grassy terraces with such gentle motion.

His long affection for her came unusually awake. He could not have told whether his words "never be seen again by mortal man," jesting as they were, had stirred this vague sense of foreboding in his imagination, or if, conversely, the sense had induced the phrase: which was the horse and which the cart.

He remembered now for the first time that unheard-of-experience of the nerves the evening when before the dinner he had looked at the roofs and chimneys of The River House in the dusk. Strange! What he was feeling now related to that as an aching aftermath to a powerful pain. A sensation of bitter sadness came upon him. It reached out like a slow cessation of light, it repined for vanishing things. And at its core was a cavern of faint fear.

His heart was moved with unwonted gratitude to Giulia for long charities. He recoiled from the image of his existence if she were not there. That was an abyss. There was no pulse of passion in him, only his deep heart stirred, forlorn, conscious of its depth.

She was smoking as she went. Her left hand held her weed. The undulating pale fume lay on the air behind her. She went slowly with a rhythmic tapping of the ivory stick on which she leaned, her hips lifting and falling with her steps, delicately defining themselves inside her scanty skirt, the rounded shapes bossing out and lessening by turns, moving independently of her quiet waist, which played a different tune.

Her small, tight, dark cropped head, tight as an acorn, swayed in a deliberate rhythm.

She diminished, she paled. She was taken by distance and the mist.

He went into the house, expecting his spirits to revive in the pleasure he had found for years in that house on Mondays. On Mondays it would be emptied of Charles and Giulietta for the week.

They would have taken the night train to Boston, or motored off after dinner on Sunday evening, he to his business, she to her school. Between the week-ends, neither had ever been known to reappear—except that once, years ago, when Giulia was ill and Charles had come hastily, the mere ghost of a horned toad—to find him, Windsor, in tears outside her door.

There was a little path, well beaten by Windsor's feet through many years, which led from his house on the opposite hill to this. It led by the terraces, concealed all the way from the village by groves, rises of ground, or detached propitious groups of trees. Sometimes he thought he was sick to death of it. No depression, no little rise, no stone along its reach was surprising to his foot on the darkest night.

But for a long time now he had never come by it at night. Once that path at night had been so charmed, so bright, so wild, he could have traversed it on his knees, kissing it all the way.

Now he could not even regret the obliteration of that burning path's enchantment. Lost senses leave their own narcotic for regret. The crystal cry of birds disturbed on summer nights was still sweet to his ear, but only for the crystal cry.

Now, reëntering Giulia's house, he passed the Japanese servant, who seemed too lost in meditation to see him, and went up the stair, with its thin spindle banisters, to her sitting room. Here the saints were thick as thieves. Carved, painted, gessoed, gilded, everywhere they were making a perpetual *santa conversazione.*

Giulia's mother had taken her in her girlhood for a few years' sojourn in France and Italy. And so much had she cared for these early works of art that, after her marriage to Charles (with his hoard), she had returned to the Old World and, as Windsor said, gorged herself on griffons. It was at this time she had changed the spelling of her name from Julia to Giulia.

It had seemed to him in his youth that Giulia's radiation proceeded from a wider culture than that of his other townswomen. He had, at first, been rather humble before the array of "artful objects" that surrounded her. It was later that he called them "artful." But before, these gilded shapes seemed to speak to him with something of mellow and erudite in their naïveté. They were a change, both sensuous and spiritual, from the mahogany and teak of the town.

And she among them loomed like Beatrice.

She had given him lessons in Italian. They had read Dante together, not all, but about Paola and Francesca and quite a bit of the Paradiso. And he had learned by heart such things as,

"*O Beatrice, dolce guida e cara*"[1]

and

". . . *dolce guida*
Che sorridendo ardea negli occhi santi"[2]

and

". . . *quella*
Cui non potea mia opera essere ascosa
Volta ver me, sì lieta come bella."[3]

He could no longer remember them exactly.

Windsor stood at Giulia's window looking down the terraces where she had disappeared. The mist of the river was mounting higher. The roofs of The River House had almost drowned in it.

He lay down on Giulia's divan among her fragrant cushions. He wanted so much to be comfortable, but he felt he could not be until her return. Yet presently he began to feel at ease.

He watched a pale green curtain, decorated with a greener Byzantine design, the chalice, the two priestly birds dipping their beaks from either side. The chalice, the priestly birds advanced and retreated in a faint breeze. The curtain was engaged in a mystical, solitary dance.

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[1] O Beatrice, sweet guide and dear!

[2] Sweet guide whose sacred eyes glowed as she smiled.

[3] She from whom my doing might not be hidden, turning to me as much in joy as beauty.

He dozed. And at once Mrs. Tredegar was before him, engaged in a solitary dance upon a squeaking board. She was looking at him through her narrow imbedded eyes full of lurking sapphire.

"Beatrice mi guardò congli occhi pieni
di faville d'amor così divini."[1]

He started awake with a sensation of distaste. He wanted Giulia to come back and tell him what that impossible woman had said. Why should Giulia want to see her? What on earth did she mean by this unprecedented avidity! The room, packed to bursting with comfortable memories, soothed him again.

There was a royally painted bed just visible beyond the tapestry of the intervening doorway. He felt he would like to be lying in it now, quite alone, and sleep to the chirping of all those little birds outside beginning to say their antiphonal complines. . . . Quite alone.

All lovers had resigned. Without a word of explanation. Charles first had resigned without a word. Sylvia, with her tuppeny candle passion. . . . Jackie was another matter, with his rage, Jackie had not resigned. He had been robbed. Mrs. Tredegar—what had she resigned? She had looked as virginal as a pawing colt. . . . Old Mr. Brewster with his gentle Rosemariolatry. . . . There were no furious yearnings in those leafy vales. No insupportable hunger for an assaulting breast. . . . Even the raging Jackie could endure. . . . The sun had died into a moon.

"Quel sol che pria d'amor mi scaldò il' petto."[2]

Mild celibacy reigned. In these gentle shades exigent desire could not hold out. And Giulia and Windsor had not been able to hold out. The invisible stoker had died at his furnace. Perhaps no lovers, married or brigand, ever did hold out.

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[1] Beatrice looked on me with eyes filled with sparks of love so divine.

[2] That sun which first warmed my breast with love.

Giulia doubted that they did, though it killed her to doubt. The idea that somewhere, even in full possession of each other, even married, lovers burned on forever with that noble fire, this idea was necessary to the life of her heart. True, she had never met a pair of holders-out, either married or brigand, who had held out over a long space of time. . . . Oh, they were affectionate, so Giulia had frequently cogitated the matter . . . in this very room. . . . They were friends—they could not get on without each other any more than they could get on without central heating. No, that wasn't fair. . . . Oh! let's be fair! . . . It was more than that. They were good as gold to each other. It was indisputable love, pardoning, compassionate affiliation, the defender of the unfaithful. But not love in the divine state of combustion. . . .

Rosemary and George had held out wonderfully. . . . How they still *looked* at each other . . . after five babies . . . but then, *they* were saints. Still, somewhere, oh, somewhere, there must be two lovers that could hold out a hundred years . . . at the full height of burning . . . and drag it, drag that wheeling heat into the grave . . . beyond? Yet, she could not imagine herself loving any man but Windsor . . . though now, O strange defeat! . . .

Now she need not even touch his hand, she who would have planned all day like a Machiavelli . . . all day, a week, a month . . . to find, to find . . . to contrive, for one moment, one instant, in passing through a door . . . to *reach* one hair's breadth of time in which to *achieve* her shoulder against his!

Now his occasional kiss was irrelevant. And gentle as it was, too hard. She always put her handkerchief to her lips after, to soothe them and take away the slightest moisture. Yet the love was true. *Even in this defeat* . . . even so. Though they had not held out . . . like lamps half filled . . . like brief candles . . . yet it was true . . . even if they had not held out.

As for Windsor, he never permitted himself to tell himself that they had not held out. He was a craftsman, a master of not saying a word more to himself than was adequate to that dear, that accomplished calm.

Yet it would have interested him could he have known . . . that Giulia had not held out as long as he. He would have pricked up his ears. Perhaps a belated smoulder of resistance would have flickered up, could he have known that during that last year of their tangible intimacy he had held an unsentient woman in his arms, a willed hospitality, a consigned benefaction. The imperious wish was dead, but the stout heart held out.

Now his imperious wish had followed hers to the unvoluntary shades. But the indestructible amity remained, conspiracy. The two stout hearts held out.

And what relief that there was no more of that sickening concealment. That had smeared indignity over the dignity of his youth. It had never been his way to crouch in shadows easily, to listen for a servant's tread, to learn the steps on the stair that sounded, to keep a lookout for the eyes of neighbours, to fool a husband.

His stomach refused the memory of that long stultification of his relation with Charles: worse because he liked Charles so well. Oddly enough, he liked the unlikely horned toad better than any other living man except Jackie. And he felt himself liked in full return.

How excoriating it seemed now—that old effort, before those intelligent and kindly eyes, to look like a man who has not recently had the other's wife in his arms. True, Charles had unconsciously eased the situation by the mathematical regularity of his goings and comings. One always knew exactly where to have him. It would have been a hundred times more excoriating with a husband of irregular habits.

How boring! No woman was worth it. He embraced the image of the refinement, the translucence of his present way of life, the purity . . . the unimpeachable dignity.

What the devil had he been thinking about bygone things for! Was there a frayed spot in the cord of his technique that habitually roped off uncomfortable reflections?

"I hate outlaws! . . . Minds innocent and quiet . . ."

It was a good many years now since he had been surprised upon his return from college, by a revelation in the fine unhappy eyes of Giulia, that hitherto unregarded cousin. He had not been able to believe his own, and was long in daring to put the wonder to the test. But under the fine stress of her assurances he had closed with the marvel, trembling with amazement, and had briefly burned.

Then had come Sylvia, virgin of virgins, with childlike eyes, enhaloed by pale hair, too pale even to be called gold. As he afterwards told himself, he had thought she was of angelic origin because she was a blonde.

He had known Sylvia from their childhood as a tiny being, fairylike and celestial, and as a young woman she had not lost her attributes of gauze. He had turned to her with the fervour of a penitent from a sickness of heart that tormented him in his early relation with Giulia, and prostrated himself at those infinitesimal pure feet as before a shrine.

Sylvia had said little. He thought, she does not need the poetry of speech: she is the poem. She is immaculate. She is the way and the life. And he had taken hasty refuge from passion and compunction and the friend who had betrayed him into dishonour.

Turning from the gilded saints that had witnessed that dishonour, he fell upon his knees before the maiden. And Sylvia, in her little horsehair rocking chair, witnessed the scalding tears of one returning to his own true religion from a period of idolatry.

They were married. The elderly aunt with whom she lived had gone away blushing, a bit of a rogue for the moment, but decorous with subtle parentheses of diplomats. She would visit in a neighbouring town until they went their journey, leaving them alone for the present in the house. The house at twilight took on, for Windsor, the awe, the consecration of a fane.

Sylvia's little dress that day had been distinguished by its quantity of buttons. They ran like dewdrops down the inward and delicately outward curving of her tiny back. There was no one there but her new husband. The servant was miraculously gone, to return to-morrow and make them that first shattering breakfast. Almost praying, he unbuttoned her.

There within was that pale place between the shoulder blades: the little down back of that small neck, drooping forward with the golden hanging head. Within the unbuttoned little dress behind were the tiny linen interior garments exposed, so touching, so defenceless, like the secret down beneath the wings of doves.

Perhaps that frail unbuttoned drooping back expected to be encouraged by a kiss. It waited, drooping more, but he had taken away his hands and closed his eyes. Beneath the lids were tears. She gave a sigh and drooped into the little rocking chair. The dress fell lower, and through his tears he saw the ivory altar of her little breast.

Then it was that he fell down. With the last leap of his soul toward perfect things he told her of his sins. Not until she had absolved him, cleansed him to the bone, should she lift him up. Of course he had not confessed for Giulia too. Her name was safe. With the last discretion of the dying he spoke of his sins as if they had all been committed in some remote place.

He waited sobbing in her diminutive lap. Her elfin thighs were against his face. But he did not want to know how sweet that was, not yet, until she had assoiled him.

At last, as she said nothing, he lifted his head, and at that moment his youth came to an end.

The small jewel of her face had turned to a dull stone. He could not remember afterwards the phrases of her little sermon.

He had hardly been able to stand at first, so had his heart been turned to water in that moment of his exaltation, the first and last so vertiginously high. But presently he could stand solidly enough to support the laughter that broke out of him. That infinitesimal Jehovah sitting there in her little rocking chair, full of trim sacerdotal utterances, was refusing herself to him until he had made a public confession of his sins, a public joining of himself to the communion of her church. The periods in which she put the thing seemed to him original and sprightly as a bray.

Two years afterward, when she had got tired of living cloistered in his house with no more communication than if they had been passers in a railway station, Sylvia confided the story to her pastor. He, a humorous old man, Adelaide Worthington's departed spouse and predecessor of the Reverend George, advised her to relent. After all, men were no more than human, and since she did so want a baby . . .

She relented, but to this day she could not think with equanimity of the inhuman mirth with which Windsor greeted her proposals. She whimpered even now whenever she mentioned it to the Reverend George. Windsor had offered her a divorce, but that was far from her idea. She was a prodigious housekeeper, and Windsor's house and the position of wife were of the highest importance to her. There she stayed, intimidated and obstinate, in a state of perpetual dusting, while people said with more truth than they knew that Sylvia Windsor seemed a regular cut-and-dried old maid.

Windsor had again taken up the stinging burden of his affair with Giulia, a burden of sweet-smelling herbs that stung, until a few years ago. Then, on his return from England, they had failed in any endeavour to rend down the veil of unfamiliarity which always weaves itself in absence.

Without a word, without an explanatory look, they failed. They had simply not bothered to circumvent the ordinary obstacles to a private meeting, obstacles which would once have turned to nothing between them, as if consumed by extremity of heat.

After the catastrophic chastisement of his bride, Windsor felt nothing at all of either true religion or idolatry, but year by year proceeded in the expansion of his character without further torments or exaltations. More and more his unique air of the quiet delighter in life solidified.

He would look longer at a flower or a cloud than anyone, and Sylvia would gaze sidelong with bewilderment to see him reading and rereading the same poem through an entire evening with a look of inexhaustible pleasure. She thought he was too lazy to turn the page.

But he did not look very long into the eyes of women. In his dear Giulia's he saw a monotonous tale he took no pains to re-read, and in the celestial blue of Sylvia's, he felt that he viewed an idiot.

But he was not entirely let alone by other women, for his charm was great. Debonair and moderately kind, he sometimes received unforeseen favours from visiting ladies, or in Boston, without, however, the slightest awakening of his fine faculties of gratitude or wonder.

A woollen mill he and his brother Jackie had inherited had been taken over by a commercial syndicate, and although the two still occupied themselves with it, Windsor took it lightly.

He had never returned to Europe. He disliked journeys, and was put out by a necessity of his affairs that took him as far as New York or Boston. The opening and shutting of a valise had an unpardonable snap to his ear.

He frequently voyaged in memory, however, lingering among arrested moments of his earlier youth in charmed places by Thames, Seine, Iser, Arno, or Tiber, but without any troublesome desire to revist the glimpses of their moons.

The effect of a prolonged series of stealthy actions upon a man of his delicacy and dignity contributed to his disinclination to action.

The circumstances of his life that would have looked like licence to an ordinary discoverer had given the very pang that drove him to a species of monasticism. He was so chastened by the spiritual discomfort which for so long had seasoned his ideas of love that no man looking at a strange woman could be more harmless.

"He is only thirty-four years old, but he is not ravenous," said Mrs. Tredegar later, when she learned his age.

"What is your substance, whereof are you made?" had been the cry of a baffled lady, couched more simply in the phrase, "For heaven's sake, what kind of a bird are you, anyway! What sort of thing *do* you like?"

"In my modest way," was his reply, "I like to be let alone."

CHAPTER IV MEANWHILE THE LADY DISCOVERS SOMETHING ABOUT A VERY ODD WOMAN

WELL, my dear, the goblin's stark mad." Giulia came into the quiet room, took a fan, and falling into a chair began fanning herself. She was not flushed with her climb from The River House, but pale. "You're right, there's something the matter with that woman."

"What did she say?" asked Windsor, getting up from the divan and relieving her of her scarf and stick.

"She didn't say anything."

"Oh, come!"

"She hid."

It appeared that as Giulia had been in the act of pulling the chain of the old bell in the porch (electricity had never been introduced into The River House), Mrs. Tredegar was seen mounting the stairs to her bedroom. She was mounting rather rapidly. As Matilda Johnson, the housekeeper, expressed it, she was "legging it up like a grasshopper." Michael, old Tredegar's valet, had also witnessed the ascent, and respectfully admitted it might have been called speedy. There was a slight appearance of twinkling in his eye.

Giulia having entered, Mrs. Johnson had gone up to announce her to the lady of the house. The lady was not in her bedroom, but Mrs. Chick, the Czecho-Slovakian wash- and scrub-woman, engaged in scrubbing the hallway, had seen her mistress just glance into that sanctuary, then proceed with celerity up the narrow stairway to the attics. Mrs. Johnson followed thither, calling. There was no reply.

Michael, the valet, then went all the way to the attics and reported that Mrs. Tredegar was not visible. Giulia, however, having a will of her own, followed halfway up the stairs, calling Mrs. Tredegar's name again and again. Mrs. Johnson assisted, so the ancient house resounded well. Mrs. Chick did not assist.

She was a short, squat, red-faced woman with bare feet. Her name was the shortening of a strange, original one of many syllables. It was odd if she had ever pronounced it herself. For she was highly monosyllabic. Now she went on scrubbing the old broad boards of the hallway, a broad little quadruped on hands and knees. Her rounded rear was like that of a sturdy horse. Without looking up, she protested against the shouting.

"Naw, naw. Don't like."

But whether she meant she did not like it herself, or if she spoke on behalf of the invisible Mrs. Tredegar, was not made clear.

Mrs. Tredegar neither replied nor appeared.

"That woman's got something on her conscience," whispered Mrs. Johnson as Giulia descended to the parlour, treading lightly as if in the presence of a mystery. "You never know if you have your hand on her or not."

Giulia sat down on the old carved sofa, panting, slightly below the attentive parakeet. "I shall wait."

She pointed to a chair, and Mrs. Johnson stiffly succumbed on the edge of it. She was a bony, middle-aged woman, who took a dark view of life. The grouching Mr. Tredegar must have found in her, during the years of her service there, a meet companion to his mood. She felt that all human contingencies could be lumped under the general head of a "disappointment." By all accounts, her deceased husband had been in one way or another a severe disappointment. But she had been spared the disappointment of offspring.

"You never know where you have her," repeated Mrs. Johnson, smoothing back her somewhat grizzled hair, already so smoothed that it had the appearance of being glued on. The knot behind was added like a button.

"Even when you've got her actually in a room, she looks like a mouse hunting for a hole. We've never seen her sit down yet of her own accord. She stands in the middle of a room for an hour, just looking around. You'd think the walls was books she was reading. . . . And for talk . . . I never could take silly talk easy—even as a child. I told her she could take over the dusting if she liked. I said, 'Nobody gainsays that it's your house.' And I said she could do anything she liked with her house—in reason. I couldn't go farther. . . . As I said, ladies generally liked to do something to their houses. . . . And, she said, 'Why do things to houses? Especially when they have a running river in every room.' "

Giulia was giving full attention, with one ear cocked toward the regions above stairs.

"Seeing that she doesn't seem to *do* anything at all," pursued Mrs. Johnson, "I thought she'd just as well get an idea of my ways, first as last. So I told her that I made it a rule in life to see just how much I could get done in every single hour. 'Well . . .' she said, 'but is it fair to the hour?' "

The two cats, which had followed the cortège up the stairs, now descended with velvet thumpings on each step and, entering the parlour, ensconced themselves at an austere distance one from the other. Though grandfather and grandson, they preferred to have it thought that there were no trivial communications between them. Little David, being gray and white, regarded Giulia with eyes of emerald. Blinko, being garbed in gold, did his looking through honey.

"Them cats!" said Mrs. Johnson, with unconvincing disapproval. "You'd think they owned the place. . . . Separate dishes and respect as if they was parsons. Nothing's too good for 'em. If the late Mr. Tredegar had a vice, it was cats. Willed 'em on *her*. . . . . ." She made a motion of the head toward the upstairs, where Mrs. Tredegar was withdrawn into the shadow of inexplicable secrecy. "Just at the very last he told Mike, 'See that she gets *intimate* with Blinko and Little David'. . . Introduce *him* to a *human* and he'd raise the roof! Couldn't bear the sight of a fellow Christian—except your husband, Mr. Charles, and short rations of *him*."

Although Mrs. Johnson was talking in Christian fashion to Giulia, it was evident to that lady that her entertainer looked upon her with no remission of her natural severity. But she could not know of the sombre communications that took place between Matilda Johnson and her widowed sister-in-law, Martha Dodd, the housekeeper of Giulia.

Martha Dodd was not by habit an inveterate pessimist like her sister-in-law, but she took on something of the latter's Stygian shade when she referred to Giulia as "a certain lady" and to Windsor as "a certain gentleman."

"You know Mr. Tredegar's buried out there, under the hemlocks behind the barn," Mrs. Johnson continued. "He wouldn't leave the place, he said. Though I'd as lief have a heap of garbage behind a house. A farmyard's bad enough without a clutter of graves. But wilful! . . . Well, what do you think? Mrs. Tredegar put the wax flowers under glass and the vases from that mantel, on the mound—and the *ivory chessmen and the ormoly clock!* . . . She said she was making her uncle's grave look jolly." Mrs. Johnson paused, glaring at Giulia with her pale eyes. "She said she was making it look *jolly!*" Presently she went on always with an indignant look of one recounting wrongs.

"I said, '*There's* your dressing table'—when she was getting settled in her room. 'I see the table, but I don't see the dressing,' said she, as if she wasn't in her proper senses. She'd put her measly old brush and a comb with three teeth on the window sill. . . . I don't know whether I can stick it out—I'm far from used to such habits. . . . But Mr. Tredegar made a point of it. 'Stand by her, when she comes,' he'd say."

Mrs. Johnson glanced at the door, and bending toward Giulia lowered her voice still more.

"She puts everything she's got, and it ain't much, in *bundles*

—and hides 'em. She said so nobody could get 'em and she could pick 'em up easy if she had to go away sudden."

Giulia endeavoured to take this in. She felt both drowsy and vaguely alert. The house was set to the low soliloquy of the river and the crooning of pigeons. A great cote was built over the outhouses that extended from the kitchen. She could see the arches of this long extension from the window away from the river, a sort of arcade under a loft, filled with country necessities. There was a rusty motor car beside an old carriage, a cart, a wagon, a cock crowing on a wheel. A plough, scythe, wheelbarrow, hanging harness. Through a wide door the rumps of two horses moved gently from side to side. Poultry strolled and pecked. In a window of the long loft above stood a spinning wheel beside a mass of hay or straw.

The pearly pigeons cooed on the long roof and circled among the old enormous trees. The garden was enclosed by the tallest and thickest of lilac hedges, more than a hundred years old. Michael was now seen chopping wood in the yard. Mrs. Johnson went on, "I said to her, 'but Mrs. Tredegar, you ain't going away are you?' and she said, looking queer, 'Convince the ships of that.' "

"She said 'Convince the ships'?" repeated Giulia.

"That's what she said. . . . And in the morning when I went to call her—she locks and bolts her door as if she was afraid of the Day of Judgment—when I called her, she said, as if she was talking in her sleep, 'Thief, take what you want but do not wake me.' "

"Send Michael up again," said Giulia, stirred from her drowsiness. She wanted to see Mrs. Tredegar. She wanted to see her more than she had wanted to see anything for several years.

Mrs. Johnson spoke to Michael through the window. He did not look up, but poised a piece of wood on his block and accurately chopped. He was a hearty-looking Irishman, a little beyond middle life, with something about the cut of his face that made one want to laugh. He wore no hat, and as he chopped, small tight curls bobbed. He was in waistcoat and shirt-sleeves and his shirt had lifted somewhat in the rear, welling out of his trousers' belt, which had been a looser fit at some much earlier time. The seat was still very trigly filled, however, and smooth with wear.

At Mrs. Johnson's second summons "Do go up Mike, and call Mrs. Tredegar again," he said in a strong brogue,

"Let the woman alone. She's in her rights at that."

As Giulia went away, he looked after her with a grin of triumph and addressed her back, loud enough that Mrs. Johnson at the gate might be benefited,

"Who axed *you,* anyway, my lady? You whangin' and tattherin' at the bell! . . . The back o' me hand and the sole o' me foot to you!"

CHAPTER V THE ODD WOMAN ENTERS SOCIETY IN AN UNUSUAL MANNER. JACKIE APPEARS IN A DOORWAY

BY THE end of the week, however, all our friends had seen Mrs. Tredegar.

She had come without invitation to Windsor's house when all the previous party, except Charles and Giulietta, were dining there. As it was not the week-end, these were engaged with business and school in Boston.

There was one addition, however, in the person of Mrs. Copeland's husband, a large, weary personage, with the air of one broken in spirit, like a man who has lived long with a woman of tact.

Mrs. Copeland made a great point of that commodity. As she frequently remarked, she always handled her husband and children with gloves. She never commanded them to do things or refrain from doing them. She put it, "It's so *like* you to enjoy doing, or not doing, this or that!"

As, for instance, with Mr. Copeland, at the approach of autumn, when she would suggest that it was quite one of his specialties to bounce into his woollen underwear betimes while the weather was still warm, to avoid colds. As he was a large, warm man, he stood aghast, yearly lost in wonder at what she persuaded him to believe was his voluntary practice.

Frequently, when he had come home from Boston, homesick for her (for he was a tender husband) she would tiptoe out of the drawing room, leaving him stark solitary all the evening with his newspaper. At intervals, he would hear her steal with weighty lightness to the door, peep in, and go upstairs again. And later, she would explain to him in bed, with subtle triumph, that she knew him so well, and how well *she* knew when he needed above all things just to be let alone.

And yet, he was a faithful husband in thought and deed, not being remarkable for imagination or the social graces.

Mrs. Worthington, in one of her naughty moods, when she was resting from maternal sobriety, had said:

"Rather than have two hundred pounds of faithful husband always about, I'd prefer a resilient, sprightly spouse that showed his heels from time to time. It would worry me to death, but it wouldn't distress me."

The extinct Mr. Worthington, their late pastor, however, had not been resilient. Adelaide lived in the ideal.

Sylvia Windsor's dinner table on this night glistened like a solar system with candles, silver, and crystal. Now, as it neared midnight, she was yawning a little as she watched the gentlemen to see that they did not put their cool moist glasses where moist things should not be. Especially she kept an eye on old Mr. Brewster. Fortunately, the Reverend George had nothing to do with glasses. *There* was no cause for anxiety. *There* was only peace.

She looked at his handsome head, his kind innocent face, with adoration. After every look she glanced at Rosemary to make sure that Rosemary had not noticed.

Rosemary hadn't. She was sitting on the arm of old Mr. Brewster's chair, hoping that Jackie Windsor, purposely excluded from the dinner, would not come barging in to glare at the Reverend George. But while she hoped, she listened to Windsor at the piano, improvising. It was not all improvising, there were bird swoops of familiar music appearing in it at intervals, gentle, sedative swoops, fragments of German *lieder* or old French songs.

Windsor's music had a rather aërial sound, as his injured left arm could not give much value to the bass.

Sylvia wished everybody would go home now, and they would not go because it was raining. But no such rain as on that night at Giulia's. They would hardly get a drop. . . . She always tidied up after departed guests before she could go to bed. She could not bear to let the morning see full ash receivers, the chairs out of place, and all the other dreadful traces. . . . It was a pity people would never sit in chairs where the chairs belonged. What was the use of their getting so near together! They never had anything to say that need be said, except the Reverend George.

She herself felt justified in drawing a chair quite a distance from its appointed spot to be nearer him.

She counted up the number of dinners that must be given by the others before she need give one again. Yet, how wonderful the table had been, and the dinner! Not even Giulia's could have outshone it. . . .

Everyone had been talking about Mrs. Tredegar, of her having been in the porch that evening at Giulia's. How extraordinary her having hid the next day when Giulia went! What on earth. . . .

"I'll wager that goblin's brought *this* rain," cried Mrs. Worthington. "What will you bet she isn't in the porch here, *now!* . . . Look there, she's coming in!"

Everyone laughed, listening to the steps in the corridor outside the room. They remembered their odd sensations of that other night . . . the imaginary woman running in the rain.

The curtain at the door was put aside, and Jackie Windsor stood there, looking at Rosemary.

Sylvia thought, "Of course he'd be barging in! Although he was told that George and Rosemary would be here!" She moved toward the Reverend George like a protective sparrow. He was looking at the newcomer as he always did: a look of remorse, of yearning sorrow, as if in a moment he would be giving Rosemary back to Jackie, with perhaps the five children to boot, for good measure.

"Hello Jackie," squeaked old Mr. Brewster. "Come in. Rosemary's here."

This lady seldom came to the houses of her friends, because of her household cares. The Reverend George would run in oftener, for a few minutes between duties.

"Hello, Jackie, have a cool one," said Windsor, getting up from the piano to mix a drink, with the air of pleasure that always appeared on him when he saw his brother, pleasure not unmixed with anxiety.

"No, thanks, I don't care for moderate drinking."

Jackie, by all appearances, had already partaken of one or two cool ones. His eyes were smouldering, and there were bright flushed spots on the cheek bones. As Giulia and Windsor turned to him with their aquiline fronts, he returned the aquiline compliment. But whereas theirs was purely cut, clear and clean, his eagle was slightly disarrayed, as if he had been beaking into a row or a high wind. It was blurred by a trifle of thickness. His hair, like theirs but grizzled, ran forward in a natural "bang" and just now had rain in it. His right eye presented an intimidating stare. The other had a glaze. Its sight had been destroyed in the war.

Compared with Jackie, every person there looked unimpeachably in order. It was felt that he was the only one in their circle that might fail to behave. Giulia alone, who had a private dread of a possible collapse of endurance in herself, did not look upon him as quite unique in this. But from her composed and stately mien, she would have been the last person for an observer to rank with a ticklish character.

"Hello, hello," said Jackie, in a voice lower and rather less pleasant to hear than Windsor's. "A gathering of the just. . . . Did you know there's a wet woman in the porch?"

There were varying accounts afterwards of how Mrs. Tredegar came into the room. Some said she was pale and bedraggled with rain. Some said she was bright as a new penny.

It was Giulia who ran out to get her, Giulia who was not a runner. Mrs. Tredegar was standing with her back against the wall in the dark, looking down through the still pathos of the rain at the village, where only a few lights still burned. Giulia found it difficult afterwards to tell Windsor exactly what Mrs. Tredegar had said.

"I can begin to see it . . . in its blinding splendour."

"What do you mean, this village?" Giulia had asked.

"This dance of perfect beings," Mrs. Tredegar went on. "From the morning when the small broomed maids begin . . . to the evening when the chimneys smoke their pipes . . . meditating on the filtered day. When the coops are closed . . . the cats in the cellars . . . the children full of milk . . . And now, the ranked order of beds. The man and woman indistinguishable one from the other. . . . The sick one has stopped sighing. . . . The graves are quiet. . . . Infant birds are leaning on each other in the nest, and moles have ceased to disturb the ground. The bells of the three churches have said their say."

"Why did you hide from me?" demanded Giulia.

"It is the good marketable Zeus that devised this pious town," said Mrs. Tredegar. "The Holy Ghost would be too occupied with delicate fiery affairs. . . . You cannot expect Him to build a town. But after, He will sit on the roofs."

"I *will* have it out of you. Why did you hide?"

"I swallowed Rome to the hilt," said Mrs. Tredegar. "I was digesting the blade."

"Do you mean you swallowed Windsor?"

"When you are hell-bent on inquiry," said the other, looking with pleasure at Giulia's face in the moist dimness, "you take on brawn."

Giulia laughed, and Mrs. Tredegar said, "There goes a bell."

"Come in out of the rain, you goblin!" Giulia began to pull her by the wet sleeve. "You're a water oaf. You can't come near us unless you've got a mail of wet."

"Oh, yes, I come in the dry."

"You mean you've been *here* before?" exclaimed Giulia.

"Just to look at him."

"Don't you know it's disgusting to look in windows? Where did you come from?"

"Uncharted," said the stranger.

Windsor came out on the porch now with his air of serene impatience.

"What are you doing? Is that you, Mrs. Tredegar? Since you're here, come in out of the rain."

"I didn't come to come . . . But the white roof of her heart is getting dewy." Mrs. Tredegar pointed to Giulia's breast, where some drops glittered.

They drew the strange visitor in. She was drenched and sat down by the fire, where she commenced to steam. She did not seem to mind being stared at. Windsor thought of what she had said at The River House, "I wear a trophy on my thigh against eyes. A periapt." Where the devil had she got "periapt" for charm, for amulet? . . . Where the devil had she got anything she'd got? He examined her with curiosity and distaste.

As she sat on the low stool leaning on her thighs (one, supposedly girded by a periapt) her neck, shoulders, flanks, and legs, well defined in the wet clothes, had a look of muscular hardness that set her apart from the sexual softness and malleability of the other women.

Sylvia, the tiny Dresden figure, was saying the things that are said by a dispassionate hostess. The humid guest levelled expert glances upon her and the others from her narrow imbedded eyes. She pointed to Rosemary, who was also saying pleasant necessary things.

"You are all spat out by some genius of beauty . . . but *she* is breathed."

"Lovely to think we're both spat and beautiful," said Mrs. Worthington, "but aren't you going to catch cold?"

"Thanks, I've got plenty of heat inside—that is, my hulk always seems to be lying in a tropic port, even when, as the other night, she's churning into the big sea up to her knightheads."

As everyone was scrutinizing her in silence, she added, less nautically:

"An idiosyncrasy. . . . My kettle boils. Dismiss the matter."

"Yes, but you *are* dripping on Mrs. Windsor's rug, you know," said Adelaide Worthington.

Mrs. Tredegar made no sign of noticing this, but continued to drip.

"Five men and five women. All married no doubt. But one is too ancient." She looked indulgently at old Mr. Brewster, who blinked at the fire, unaware.

"Don't class me with the damned," said Jackie. "I'm the only one in town not married. Undefiled."

"We're lucky to-night," said Adelaide. "We usually have to scrat on with half a man. You see, men won't stay here if they can gnaw a way out—that is, none between the first and last infancy—between bibs. A toothless town as far as males are concerned."

"But if you had frequent *festas,*" said Mrs. Tredegar, looking thoughtfully into the fire, "jolly saints' days, with a band in the piazza at night and young men walking and singing with their arms round each other's waists . . . Fireworks too, cannon and rockets from all these good hills. The sweet mild women would come out in fresh embroidered aprons and earrings, and their children would dance, see puppets and effigies, and aspire with coloured balloons."

Mrs. Worthington gave a right little, tight little chuckle.

"New England hasn't succeeded in 'registering' with you, it seems. I suppose you're talking about Italy."

"Well, let it be Italy, then we can think of the vine," returned the other. "Also of olive trees that are in moonlight at high noon, green and russet spurge, purple thyrsus of artichokes, plantagenet, cockades of valerian in cups of mouldy walls, the *colchicho autunnale* and poppies, poppies, poppies, poppies. That's for sleep. . . . We can think too of velvet persons with horse's eyes, moving in vineyards and the wheat, as if in sleep. . . . Italiot. Along the terraced slopes above the *mör* intolerably blue, they have the sadness of people in bliss."

When she was asked to explain the word "*mör,*" she seemed at a loss and could not tell if she had meant to say "sea" or "mother."

"Even you would hardly have wanted to say 'above the mother intolerably blue,' would you?" inquired Windsor.

"I don't know," said Mrs. Tredegar.

As, after that evening, she became habituated in all their houses, they all, Giulia and Windsor especially (he curious in spite of his disinclination), watched for the appearance of unexplained words in her talk.

"Now let us go quite slowly down the *gallt*," she said once, meeting Windsor on the hillside.

"What on earth is *gallt?*"

"This, I think," she replied vaguely, indicating the wooded slope that descended toward her house. She called a stone a *lech.*

Sometimes she spoke of the river as an *afon* and sometimes as an *elv.* And once, when Windsor found her leaning on his gate and contemplating the charming enclosure, she called it his *llan.* To his question, she conveyed that she had meant to say, "his sacred or dedicated place."

She seemed highly uncertain about these words and did not know if they were Welsh or Danish.

But to return to the occasion of her first social appearance on the evening of Sylvia's dinner. She seemed disinclined to go when there was a general rising of the others. Indeed, she asked the friends why they should return to their homes so early when they might stay longer and go on looking at Windsor.

He was aghast. She ended by gazing intently at him, with the exclamation, *"Ridderlig!"*

Jackie alone had the strength to ask what she meant by this. She said, "Riderly," and seemed to think she had conveyed the idea of a chevalier, of something knightly.

"He is the red rose of the barons," she added, "But *sorgen har natsvarte roser."*

To Rosemary's inquiry, Mrs. Tredegar replied that she thought the line was Danish, and meant, "Sorrow has night-black roses." She added, gazing at the inquirer's vesper face, "A woman like you but with fair hair sings that in my head."

"How is she like me?" asked Rosemary.

"She is a *mör.*" (A mother.) She pronounced it like "moor."

CHAPTER VI THE TOWN AGOG, AND TWO DEMANDS FOR A KISS

THE town now became quite agog over its new inhabitant. Little else was discussed at tea tables, new instances of Mrs. Tredegar's singularities were reported, and there were efforts, salutary as mental exercise, to repeat her queer sayings verbatim.

"I don't care," said Sylvia, at Mrs. Copeland's tea table. "I think that eloquence is entirely uncalled for."

"It glares," said Windsor. "It has too much sheen."

"No, it is not enough," said Mrs. Tredegar, innocent of eloquence. "We should be chanting."

"You mean I ought to sing when I ask you for the salt?" inquired Mrs. Copeland.

"Only chant can express your extremity," said Mrs. Tredegar, "the extremity of terror and delight in which you live. . . . There are a divine people in India who always sing in replying to any serious question. The earlier Japanese communicated entirely in poems upon all important occasions. . . . Mr. Windsor cannot speak without producing the tones of the deeper stringed instruments, and Mrs. Giulia Crawford responds with a bell."

Giulia's smile increased, Windsor's diminished into his expression of serene annoyance.

"You've been a great traveller, Mrs. Tredegar," said he.

"I'm a great reader of guide books."

She had a way of standing when others would be sitting. She would lean against mantel-shelves, standing interminably on her strong legs, one foot crossed over the other like Greek bas reliefs of Sleep or Death. Yet she was alert.

"You look so ready," said Giulietta, who had taken quite a fancy, in her imperturbable way, to the stranger.

"Oh, I'm ready, I'm ready."

"But when she does sit down, she sits harder than anybody."

Another day, Giulietta reported this to Windsor, who did not care to hear.

"I mean, she gives her mind to the sit. . . . To see that woman put her feet in the sun and sit does me good. To see anybody that rooted does me as much good as going to bed. She rests you like a clam. . . . Something seems to strike her all of a sudden that she's here, and there's an actual chair. And she gives up."

"What does she give up?"

"Being ready," Giulietta went on. "She wants to be like us more than anything on earth."

"The woman's a lunatic," said Windsor.

"She said she wanted to do as the Romans do. And, she said, if there's one thing more Roman than another, that's the thing for her. . . . But she's scared to death. She's got the pip."

"What is she scared of?" Windsor inquired.

"There's something after her," returned Giulietta, leaning her round cheek thoughtfully on her fist, her elbow on one knee spread wide from the other, like a boy's. Her other hand dangled a tennis racquet between them. Windsor and she were sitting on the lawn at Giulia's house.

"She said she supposed nothing unusual could possibly happen here."

"Why should it anywhere?" asked Windsor.

"I told her that nothing out of the way could happen in this hole. . . . And she said, 'That's the rig. Here I'll set up my tent.' Queer of her to say, 'That's the rig.' "

"I've no idea what she means."

"She said she thought this place was as safe as any," concluded Giulietta, rising and swinging the racquet between her legs in a standing position for a change. "I asked her what from, and she said 'Afreets.' . . . What the dooce is an Afreet? She's a bird. But if you ask me, I'll say she's all to the good. She's creamy."

Mrs. Tredegar had a way of not touching things. She did not shake hands unless her hand was effectually taken. She let door knobs alone and looked through windows.

She had a curious attitude of bending to look at bric-à-brac, or to see the title of a book without lifting it up, her hands clasped behind her back.

"Royal bone," she said of an ivory paper cutter to Sylvia, one afternoon. "Would you mind turning it over?"

Sylvia turned it over and left Mrs. Tredegar to peruse the other side, her hands still behind her back. That was the one quality Sylvia liked in the strange woman. She was safe not to "monkey" with things. Looking through windows, in Sylvia's estimation, did not compare with monkeying as a deplorable habit. She went across her perfect room to the other ladies who had put all their cups back on the tea tray, as they should, instead of leaving them about. Sylvia took this in with satisfaction, then exhibited to her guests some silks and velvets she had brought home from Boston: the velvet not to be "made up" until the autumn, but purchased now because of a good opportunity.

Mrs. Tredegar left the piece of "royal bone" untouched on the table and came over to the group where they were handling the stuffs, fingering and appraising.

"Feel that," said Mrs. Copeland, holding out a velvet.

"I never touch nice things," said Mrs. Tredegar.

"Why not?"

"No tactile sense. Aside from that, I have plenty of eyes and ears."

As for eyes, the ladies thought, "You certainly don't use them on your awful clothes."

"Why do you wear red dresses?"

"For Charles," said Helga. "He can't get anybody else to wear red—not as red as he likes it."

"Sweet of you, but aren't you a widow?"

"Oh, I suppose so," replied Mrs. Tredegar carelessly. "Hah, here you are, you rascal!"

This was addressed to Giulietta who had stalked in from the garden and stood beside her.

Mrs. Tredegar had not looked round, and she did not know that Giulietta was expected there. But she always pricked up her ears for a step.

The variations in her behaviour were the subject of considerable comment. She would be listening almost painfully to what was being said, intent as a cat on a mouse hole, rivetting childishly on every face. Then, without any reason apparent to the speakers, she would lose all interest and fall to yawning. She never made the slightest effort to repress her yawns, and she did not bother to cover her mouth, but cordially revealed the rich interior, the roseate cave well armed with strong teeth.

Then again, she would resume an attitude highly alert. Giulietta said she pricked up her ears like a dog, as it were, sniffing the air, and when someone came into the room, she would say, "Ah, there you are!" as if she had been waiting for that particular arrival.

"What's the matter with the tactile sense?" asked Giulietta, standing beside Mrs. Tredegar like a bluff boy. They were of the same height and both of vigorous frame. But Helga had no swagger in her strong legs. Her movement was slow, circumspect, rather lionlike, as if the powerful sure movement might arrest itself at a sound and become highly attentive.

Neither she nor Giulietta was heavy, yet they both gave an impression of weight, the elder from her leonine slow action, and the fourteen-year-old girl from her cublike swashing habit which Mrs. Tredegar called "rakehelly."

"Well, what about this here tactile sense?" repeated Giulietta, imitating some sort of dialect.

"I don't like to feel anything nice," replied Helga.

"Let's see how a good kiss would go." The young girl uttered this in a tone the farthest possible from tender. Her round face retained its almost sullen impassivity. Out of the corner of her eye she saw the other shrink back.

"Nothing would come of it," Helga said, and bent over the velvet in Mrs. Copeland's hands as if much depended on her making a very careful examination of the texture.

Giulietta hesitated. She liked Helga very much, and she was accustomed to giving rough caresses, leaning on shoulders, slapping backs. She had often wished to put her blacksmith's arm round the stranger's waist and saunter with her. But some impalpable suggestion had dissuaded her.

Now, she was rather abashed and indignant. Mrs. Tredegar, who she really thought was the height of creaminess, seemed large and old and impregnable. A hot flush ran along her downy cheeks.

She stood at bay, her heroic legs, bare and visible above the knees, spread apart. Mrs. Tredegar, aware of her suffering, said without looking up from the velvet, "You mustn't mind me, my bully-O. . . . I'm a queer fellow."

With a bound, Giulietta was upon her. "I don't care how queer you are. I hate kissing women, but you're going to get kissed."

She clasped Mrs. Tredegar energetically round the neck and waist, uproarious with release from her discomfiture of a moment ago.

She naïvely expected a tussle, and was surprised to feel the head of Mrs. Tredegar fall back on her shoulder without resistance. Giulietta hesitated, catching her mother's eye fastened on her across the spread velvet. Giulia's fine nostrils were quivering. The look of repulsion and disdain in her gaze drove Giulietta to the kiss. She plunged her rosy mouth down into the corner of Helga's lip, then let her stagger away from her abrupt release.

Giulia dropped her eyes. The other ladies burst into a laugh at Giulietta, who sat down, sullen, straddling a chair, her face burning with shame from which she thought she would never recover.

"You see, you mustn't manhandle *everybody*, my dear," cried Mrs. Copeland, not bothering to exercise her famous tact. Giulietta was not one to be handled with gloves.

Mrs. Tredegar took a chair, placed it beside Giulietta's and straddled it in the same fashion. She had turned quite pale from the encounter. The young girl gave her a fainting smile of forgiveness, but, unable to bear more, plunged out into the garden and away.

"You all get along so nicely because you aren't kind," said Mrs. Tredegar, with admiration, still riding her chair, to the ladies.

"What on earth are you saying?"

"Oh, you're kind, you're kind, but you're not kind at *heart*. *That's* where it gets to be a nuisance and an open shame." She was asked to elucidate.

"Well, you wouldn't run amuck. You wouldn't spill your heart's blood to save another's dying from a blush."

"We certainly would spill everything we have for our children," said Mrs. Copeland with dignity.

"Ah, yes. There's the rift in your virtue," returned Mrs. Tredegar. "There you're no better than the beasts of the field."

"Well, what about your own heart?" asked Mrs. Worthington. "In common kindness, you might have given the poor child a kiss."

"No, I mightn't."

"No? Well, she meant the best by you," said Giulia. "She was disgusting, but she was kind at heart."

"Yes, that's why she was disgusting," returned the stranger. "It is an open shame. . . . We dare not show the intolerable love we have for each other. . . . That would be anarchy. . . . And this is your perfection. You know that the right not to be loved is sacred."

"Though the most violated," added Giulia.

"But not by *you*."

"Do you mean me in particular?"

"Yes."

"Oh, you don't know me!" Giulia laughed. She did not laugh easily. In fact, you might be thinking she could not laugh at all, when there would be one single note, very silvery. As Helga had said, "a bell."

"Well, we were prepared for oddities from you, Mrs. Tredegar," said an elderly lady in an old and long black satin dress which had never suffered curtailing, "but hardly for an evangelistic turn—a sermon on the heart."

"Oh, that isn't my sermon," returned Helga. "I'd rather trust my bally neck to a head than to a heart, any day of the world."

When Sylvia had dismissed her friends she summoned her maid and began at once to clear away the loathsome traces of their having been there.

The elderly lady in the long dress was the last to go down the path, leaning on a wan niece, of the sort designed by heaven to be leant on by an aunt. The aunt held up her trailing skirt in a bygone manner, while she audibly hoped the niece would not get on any sort of terms with Mrs. Tredegar.

Giulia, on descending the steps, had drawn that strange lady into the garden. Beyond on the lawn, the peacock, Prince Igor, was pacing, and pausing to utter his wrongs in a grievous cry. His consort had lately died. He burned alone.

"I swear," said Helga, "the garden has been waiting harder than a Fate."

"What was it waiting for?" Giulia inquired.

"Not us. . . . It hasn't stopped waiting."

"For Windy, you think?" asked Giulia, with a bright look at the other, who nodded. "He baulks at Sylvia's teas. He's lying low at my house."

"And by the simple act of going there," said Helga, "we might actually see him." She seemed to muse on the strange conveniences of the town.

"But he doesn't want to see you, you know," said Giulia.

"Yes, I know. I make his gorge rise. His eyebrows are wringing their hands whenever I am there."

"It isn't as bad as that. But he doesn't care much for women," Giulia returned. "And you are rather worse than most, you must admit."

"Oh, I'm worse. I'm worse, but I am not a woman. It isn't that that makes his gorge rise. . . . He can't abide rant. . . . He wishes to think of quiet poets, of Tagore in his sanitarium of wisdom. He doesn't wish to think of harlequins, thieves, brawls, giraffes, waterspouts, or tornadoes. He doesn't care to hang himself in a ship's cordage. And just now he doesn't care to think of Aphrodite, the golden grandmother."

The two women went to and fro in the paths, saturated with the dripping sweet of lilacs.

"Will you give me a kiss?" said Giulia.

She was surprised into a laugh, for Mrs. Tredegar sprang from her muse as tight as a cat. Then, with an abrupt muscular display, she shot out of the gate and went careering down the hill.

Giulia followed to the open gate and watched the departing shape, her smile slightly more defined than usual.

When Helga had reached a considerable distance in her descent she stopped and looked back. Giulia, still leaning thoughtful and smiling on the gate, the two gazed at each other across the intervening air.

Neither made a lift of the hand nor any sign, and presently the stranger went on, moving quietly down the wooded undulations toward The River House, with her slow, rather long step.

Giulia thought there was something beastlike in the way her shoulders now crouched forward, the head intent upon the ground, with occasional quick glances behind, or to either side. She watched the stranger appearing and disappearing among the groups of trees, past the firs of the graveyard and down the grassy open places, until her shape in its red dress had become almost indistinguishably small far below toward where the river lay like a yellow scarf. It was nearing sunset.

Now Giulia saw that very small, almost indistinguishable red shape stop. Another, even more indistinguishable, for it was of a pale gray, was pausing near. This one now made as if to ascend, then paused again and presently went toward the other.

Even across the faintly palpitating veil of intervening air, Giulia knew that it was Windsor.

CHAPTER VII CONTAINING THE THIRD DEMAND FOR A KISS

"THAT was a good run you made on the hill, Mrs. Tredegar," said Windsor.

"I'm running yet," she replied, moving slowly forward, erect now, the shoulders thrown properly back. "I'm panting like a ship out of water. . . . But I don't want to look at you now."

"You don't have to look at me," he said, smiling. "I meant only to say a civil word and pass."

"Your civility will deck my bed," she replied. "See! how formidable that star is even in the track of the falling sun."

"Yes, I was watching it emerge."

"To-night I am the star-protected," she said with what he called a befuddled look. "But to-morrow I shall be protector of stars in their peril."

He eyed her reflectively. They were walking on together.

"Did you go to my house with your civility?" she asked.

"Far from it." He laughed, recalling the uncomfortable things she had said to him there. She looked at his laugh.

"I sometimes walk by the river when teas are in progress," he concluded, indicating the colour of the water with his stick. "I have the stomach of an ostrich for woman's society, but not the capacity of a whale."

"Your wife says you have a weak stomach for food. . . . Why, then, do you look like Phœbus going windily?"

"So sweet of her to bear my frailties in mind," he returned drily. "Don't you know that men have reached such a point of refinement they go berserk if a woman mentions their looks?"

"In your perpetual smiling there is something resigned—Greek," she brought out.

"Oh, I'm resigned," said he, laughing. "Aren't you?"

"I'm abject." They had walked on together down to the very bank of the now paling river. To the right rose the towering trees of her homestead, the house beneath them nestling for the night. The pigeons were at their last circling. Perched on all the roofs, they tended drowsily toward their cotes, with throbbing gutturals. The poultry could be heard bidding good-night as they entered their coops. A horse whinnied to the voice of the valet, Michael. The chimney smoked. Above and through all was the sleepy talk of little birds, as if from rocking cradles.

"You look far from abject," said Windsor, sitting down on a great stone at the river's edge and pointing her to his side. She continued to stand.

"Oh, I'm tricky," she replied.

"Will you have a smoke?" He was about to light a cigarette.

"I don't know how."

"Just as well. It isn't really quite natural to be sticking fumes into the human lung, I suppose."

"Oh, I think it was always natural—the hunger for fire," said she. "Like the eating of a hero's heart."

He examined her through the veil that proceeded from his mouth and nostrils. His serenity seemed complete. She stood quietly a little turned away, in her red dress, burning with sunset, watching him out of the tail of her eye.

"I notice nowadays you men have to bounce about like terriers lighting ladies' cigarettes. It's quite an added burden on your chivalry, isn't it?"

"Oh, we rather like it," said he; "it reminds us of when we succoured virgins. . . . Do you know I've had a peeved conscience about you. I don't think I've been particularly nice to you."

"Oh, your beauty alone is charity," she gravely returned.

He took on his look of serene annoyance. "I wish you wouldn't talk like that."

"Like what?"

"I believe you have no idea what you say," he threw out with quiet acerbity. "And I believe you have no more conception of what you are than a chimpanzee. But I don't think I ought to be wroth with you . . . if I can help it."

"Even your wrath is a benevolence."

She turned her back and looked up the long incline to where at the end of a narrow vista between trees the lights of the town could just be seen. The three churches were ringing the hour.

"How pleasant of religions to speak in bells—or muezzins. *Sanctus, sanctus, sanctus* . . . *Nunc et in hora mortis* . . . In all the houses the women are teaching their female children."

"What mysteries are they teaching them?" he asked.

"Ah, you see that's just what I don't know."

"Guess."

"Well . . . buttons, baskets, butteries . . . gear . . . refining, refining . . . inhuman cleanliness . . . brutal endurance . . . No, I can't guess the rest. The rest is the main gist."

"I really believe that would explain you," said he, still sitting, swinging his stick between his knees, meditating. "No woman ever taught you things. You are a goblin, and you have no more mother than Dionysos."

She went on standing, looking up at the lights of the now almost invisible town.

"It would be more hedged if there were more Royal Personages."

"With the divinity that doth hedge?" he asked.

"Divinity is the salt," she added. "Fortunately for the town, you provide almost enough. More than enough for those who do not clamour for omens."

An abrupt strong wind now bore down along the hillside. All the trees, filled with dusk, bent and struggled, with deep murmurs. A long detonation of thunder wheeled its car half round the horizon.

"Feet on hollow decks," said Mrs. Tredegar. "A towering sea."

With a last dying effort the vanished sun lifted up a torrent of wild delight on a confusion of clouds. The two seemed to see in them an ocean banked with a turbulence of curious mountains—a purple port.

"Junks at dawn," she remarked. "If you want an eternity at short notice—that wild convenience . . . On such a night we can be full of grief without being the least annoyed."

"As there are going to be tons of water this evening," he said, "you will be coming to our windows."

"No, I needn't now."

"Why not, now?"

"Not to-night, now I've seen you."

"I wish you wouldn't begin that sort of thing again," he complained. "That's what keeps me from being decent to you."

"I'd rather be hung for a lamb than a sheep," she replied. "An *agnus dei*. . . . But I don't want to be hung at all to-night. My throat is a little ticklish. . . . Look at that scalawag!"

She indicated a poniard of lightning that was now driven into the mountain far beyond the river. "Aren't you afraid you'll be wet with your dove-clothes?" she asked.

"It isn't coming after all," he said. "It's drawing off across the mountain. Are you sorry?"

"Yes, I always hang on its coming, if it mentions it at all."

Two owls now began their long quivering cry. First answering from far apart, one across the river, one from the hill, the changing points of sound showed they were gradually approaching each other.

Windsor and Helga, standing midway between the voices, listened to them as if their life depended on that approach. The wind had gone by. Not a leaf stirred. There seemed to be no sound now from the farmhouse, no chirp of little birds, nothing but those long, inconsolable cries, each answering the other more instantly as the criers drew more near.

Now the owl from the hill was so close his call was stabbing.

The excitement of the event increased. Then, he was visible, dropping with soundless wings from tree to tree. They were astonished at the breadth of wing. Now, straight across the river came the other like a bullet, and, near enough to stir the watchers' hair, the two crashed together with heart-shattering screams.

They were gone, and there was silence for a time. Then a turtledove took up his mourning. A dog barked at the farm, and like a string of lights along the coast answering each other, at intervals along the hill, the dogs replied.

"There were never owls enough before," said Helga. "That is one of the worst faults of the sea. . . . Dearth of owls. . . . Yet once, near Venice, far, far out on the lagoon, there was a nightingale. Perhaps the running floor of the Adriatic had heaved a handful up to support a leaf for him. . . . If a flower appeared in the middle of the sea, the bee would arrive. . . . But what foam could fondle owls? . . . One wept with me all night."

"Last night? Why did you cry?" Windsor looked with surprise at her dim face. He had not thought of her as human enough for tears. His conscience had given him several tweaks for his coldness toward this grotesque, solitary woman, in their strange place, and now he felt a vague further pang.

"Why did you cry?" he repeated.

"I wept like a mouse."

"Why like a mouse?" he inquired.

"Littleness, stealth, squeak."

He reflected on this, beset by distaste, regret, curiosity.

"But you won't cry to-night?"

"Oh, no, your *herlighed*, your seignorial splendour, will make me hearty. You will keep me company like the sorrow of owls, and yet I shall be concealed from your incurious heart. That's the great point. . . . While I am making the most of your illustrious face."

There was another dagger of lightning thrust into the mountain. They waited for the thunder. It did not begin for a long time, then gathered itself slowly.

"Come on, my Tartar!" said Mrs. Tredegar. And as it broke around them in a great, at last completed bellow, she added, "Why were you so long, my lamb?"

A sort of giant cowbell began to ring in the enclosure of The River House.

"Ah, that's for me!" she cried. "The farm hands' bell. They used to ring it for my uncle. . . . My eye! They'll have his spook up and scurrying to supper in its shirt tail!"

She was starting away, when Windsor laid his hand on her shoulder.

"First, give me a kiss."

CHAPTER VIII POETRY UPON THE TOWN: AND THE SORROW OF OWLS

"You've seen senseless terror like that on the face of a child," said Windsor to Giulia, "but not on a grown man or woman."

"But why did you want to kiss her?"

"I don't think I did," he returned. "I suppose I thought that ladies mustn't tell gentlemen they have illustrious faces with impunity. . . . I think she'd put me in a rage."

"She's not a lady," Giulia rejoined. "Rosemary says she's not a woman, she's poetry upon the town."

"Like a plague."

"Rosemary wants to kiss her," Giulia smiled faintly, recalling the afternoon, "and I think Jackie looks that way."

"Not Jackie," Windsor objected. "And I didn't do it, you know. My hand dropped off her as if it were frozen when she behaved like that."

They were walking on the terrace at Giulia's house. He had dined there, coming rather late from Helga and the river. But at this house, and in fact at every house, he was pardoned everything. People were careful of him because he was amiable without being very careful of them.

The threatened tempest had drawn away beyond the mountain. Not a drop had fallen, yet the air that bore the clear moonlight had a fresh sweet trouble from what had passed over it.

Giulietta had come out with her insecure swagger to join the pair on the terrace, but Charles had summoned her back. These two were on the point of starting in his motor car for Boston. As the night had turned out clear, they would not go by train. It was Sunday, and their weekly release from business and school was up. In front of the house the car was churning.

The pair on the lawn, tall, aquiline, seemly, came across the glittering grass and bade the departers good-bye.

Charles made short work of good-byes. With him there were none of those wistful lingerings, those unconvinced returns that wear a hostess to the bone. At friends' houses, the moment in which Charles said, "I'm off," was mathematically coeval with his offness.

The car howled away with diminishing howls. Giulia and Windsor gave the comforted sigh that always followed this event, and returned to their muttons and the terrace.

"What do you suppose it is that has produced Mrs. Tredegar?" he said. "How does she get that way?"

"Well," Giulia reflected. "There must have been some very unusual conditions in her entire life. A state of things we haven't any idea of—an isolation. . . ."

"Won't she tell you?" he asked.

"She decidedly won't. I've tried every decent means—not to say indecent. She's an oyster. . . . Oh, she's got reasons. . . . She daren't tell."

"But her talk!" he said, after a long silence, in which they reflected together in the ease of intimacy. Windsor was completely at ease with Giulia, accustomed as he was to one woman for many years, one mistress of the technique of companionship.

"Her talk," he repeated.

"Well," said Giulia. "Imagine a marked natural aptitude for 'words and langwidges' and notions . . . in a situation where there was almost no communication, unless perhaps with one unusual person, a person of some scholarship. . . . But none of the abrasion of ordinary intercourse, the paring off, the thinking on the sly, the taking on of uniform expressions, the defensive colouring. . . . That woman has never found out we don't mention it when men have illustrious faces."

"Giulia, you are a one! You would make a prime detective," said Windsor, "but, in God's name, why should she speak in blank verse?"

"She's an aboriginal. Fiji Islanders and West Coast Irishmen talk in flowers of speech. She's an aboriginal of some place we don't know about."

"Well, wherever it is, it doesn't know about our poor little decorums," he complained.

"She nearly destroyed Giulietta yesterday," said Giulia, laughing inaudibly, and told Windsor of Mrs. Tredegar's coming in upon a little party on the lawn, where her daughter and some of her contemporaries, girls and a boy or two, home momentarily from school, were playing tennis.

"Oh," Helga had said to Giulietta. "I thought you were the only one that had legs to such an extent—legs of an archangel."

She had stood gazing at the young girls' nether members as if she could not get enough of the revelation. This was in the year when the skirts of women were only beginning to make their long veil.

Giulietta stood by in extremity, giving the stranger her bovine stare. So did all the other maidens. There was no mobility in the tender mouths and young undecided lineaments. Every head was cropped, trim, hard and sleek as a bullet. Every body was lean and rigorous as a boy's.

"Glory of legs," Mrs. Tredegar had pursued, "and hard heads. Spartan . . . Everything whipped, stripped. Thank God I have lived to see this marvel."

The stare had become concentrated as with a herd of cows intruded on by a strange spectacle.

"But how do you keep so triumphantly from having breasts and things?" Mrs. Tredegar had inquired.

At this, Giulietta, unable to bear more, suggested that Mrs. Tredegar and she go elsewhere, "siphon themselves off." When they were apart, the others returned without a word to their game.

"Didn't you see how you were getting their goats?" complained Giulietta. "Didn't you care a hoot for the way you were making them give you the fishy eye?"

"Oh, they don't get me down," reassured the other. "I batten on terrors."

"But, Lord! Didn't you see how you got *them* down? . . . They're crazy about you . . . You make the old hens perfectly sick, but the younger set think you're all to the good. So in common decency you oughtn't to go and get wolfish on them."

"Can't you do anything about Giulietta's appalling slang?" asked Windsor when Giulia had recounted this, the moonlight playing upon her faint smile.

"What can I do?" she languidly returned. "When I protest, she says, 'Giulia's got the dainties to-day.' "

"I wish I could have seen the aboriginal Mrs. Tredegar among the legs," said he. "Has she never seen any young females before?" An owl began the trembling fall of its long cry. The shrubbery where it hid seemed suddenly a place dedicated to the bereaved. "You will keep me company like the sorrow of owls," that incendiary woman had said. He felt a trouble. He drew Giulia toward the lighted house.

"I could stand her being poetry upon the town," he said, "if she wouldn't be poetry on me."

"Well, do you think your wanting to kiss her would help to keep her off?" asked Giulia.

"I didn't want to kiss her."

"*We* did."

"Who did?"

"We still do."

CHAPTER IX A YOUNG LOVER GIVES HER FATHER A START

MEANWHILE Charles Crawford was driving his daughter back to her school in Boston.

He was as methodical as the zodiac. Winter and summer, the same, he became apparent to the community at sunset on Friday and ceased to be so on Sunday evening. For many years he had never been visible there between these periods.

He was a taciturn man. No one in his neighbourhood had ever heard him refer to the business he carried on in Boston, no one but old Tredegar, the extinct uncle of Helga. They had been associates in that bank which had to do with the disappearances of Charles, who was now the old fellow's executor and pocket for Mrs. Owen Tredegar. Helga was curiously shy of asking him for funds and would keep off it as long as she could. His whole ponderous blunt structure accused her of extravagance. So did the whole slight acute structure of Mrs. Johnson, her housekeeper.

"I've got to go to Mr. Crawford for some more money," Helga would lament. "Isn't it ridiculous that I couldn't keep any of that last?"

"You handled it too rough," was Mrs. Johnson's reply.

Charles was thinking of Helga telling him that with rueful laughter. He smiled so slightly that his daughter would not have known that he was smiling if she had not been familiar with the meaning of that extra tightening at the corner of his tight lip. She did not ask what it was about, as she was well aware that such an inquiry always went without reward. Two hundred years before, a man with Charles's ponderous face and form had driven a stagecoach with four spanking horses (from England) over this same road. His descendant now made his car speed down a hill between neglected fields decked out with indistinguishable spring. It left a swath of the nearest grasses and blossoms violently waving in the cloven air.

Giulietta felt they were going to shoot off the edge of the world, plump into the moon. She wished she could have her own tough hands on the wheel. No speed was enough for her. She mused upon the aëroplanes and diabolical racing cars she meant to conduct when she grew up.

Charles was thinking of Mrs. Tredegar and of Giulia's seeming so enchanted with her. If Giulietta had glanced at him then she would have seen his expression grow more complex, secret as the exterior wall of a labyrinth.

Rosemary, too, exhibited signs of being unusually drawn to the stranger. She, he reflected, who for years had made so few efforts to escape from her babies to friends' houses, would trust Mrs. Chick's daughter to watch the cribs in the evening while she went where Mrs. Tredegar was to be.

"And Windsor?" Nothing escaped Charles.

Yesterday he had gone to The River House to talk with Helga about her property affairs. And his sidelong glance had been arrested by the sight of Windsor, who had come down the path to the gate, but seeing Charles with the lady in the garden, had turned quickly away and disappeared along the bank of the river.

Mrs. Tredegar, with a pigeon on her wrist, had been speaking at the moment of Rosemary's small feet.

"They are probably transparent like crystal, and feathered," she had said.

"Well, they are small," he admitted, examining her for signs that she also had seen the furtive Windsor.

"They are Sapphic fragments."

Mrs. Tredegar's own feet were noble in dimension, more epic than fragmentary. She had gone on with sudden practicality to inquire if Rosemary were not forced to wear a child's shoes, and did Charles know what was their measure.

"The Sapphic measure."

He had come up pretty well with that, he reflected. Luckily he had happened to read something about the lady of Lesbos in one of Windsor's books.

He was always laboriously perusing Windsor's books in his rare moments of leisure aside from business and golf. He had a curiosity about what interested so inexhaustibly this graceful and instructed friend.

In the garden of The River House, yesterday, he had talked to Mrs. Tredegar, also, of her responsibilities as a householder. He had said:

"You *are* the owner here, you know, though you don't behave much like it."

"Oh, yes, my ghost and I have bought this bee," she had replied, "and the shadow of that bird. . . . We must try to be elf-worthy."

She had not seen the come and go of Windsor, Charles reflected, guiding his car so slowly round a team of oxen that the great eyes were not roused from their twilight meditation.

He thought of Giulia's radiant look when he told her the crazy things Mrs. Tredegar had said. She had made him repeat them to make sure he had them exact. Charles was always exact. How keen she was about that woman!

"Dad, do you think it was awfully stinking of me to kiss Mrs. Tredegar?"

It was the voice of Giulietta that startled him from his reflections. After a pause he said:

"Why? She ought to be darn glad of it. I would."

An expression of tenderness and comfort came through the hard surface of the young girl's face.

"I'd give you a chaste salute oftener if you weren't so darned wide," she returned. "It's a day's work to get my arms half way round."

Charles chuckled and inquired:

"Well, what's eating you? Didn't she like it?"

"No. . . . I thought she was going to faint. . . . I took her by force."

The swift eye of Charles darted sideways at his daughter. He gave a sort of grunt as if to say, "Well, I give up!" After a while he threw out:

"You'd better let that woman alone."

"I don't want to let her alone. . . . And neither does Mother. She'll get her . . . and I won't!"

"What do you want her for?" he inquired.

"Well, Rosemary says she's poetry on the town . . . and don't poetry always make you feel like a fool?"

Charles gave a still more desperate grunt and they drove several miles in silence. Then Giulietta piped up again:

"Why couldn't I have toddled around with them just a little while before we started?"

"Toddled around with what?"

"With Giulia and Windy on the lawn," she complained.

"Because you couldn't."

"They were only talking about Mrs. Tredegar," she persisted.

"If they were only talking about God Almighty you couldn't butt in. . . . You flappers suffer bad from the idea that people like to have you around. . . . It's a disease."

"Oh, you're always romping on me, Dad," she returned. "You'd think I was all wet."

They shot through the wind a while in silence.

"Before your school term closes," Charles was speaking again to his daughter, his small reticent blue eyes fastened on the road ahead, a cigar between his teeth, his powerful hands guiding the wheel with control to a hair's-breadth. "Before that, you'll pick out your place for the summer, girls' camp, or whatever the fool thing may be. And make all arrangements bright and early, so you won't have to stay more than two days at home. I'm not going to have you bothering Giulia."

"I haven't been bothering Giulia," she protested.

"You'd bother anybody," he rejoined, looking straight ahead but not without a slight affectionate smile. "You're an accurately designed congenital bother."

"Oh, Dad, I'm not a bit congenital. And I haven't been home to stay since I was five. Off with aunts, governesses, grandmothers, schools, and everything till an innocent bystander would think I was a case of hydrophobia. That's no way to treat your angel child."

"Well, it's the way *you're* going to go on being treated."

"You're certainly the Tender Parent of the Movies!" said she.

"I've told you before that I was managing you, and you might as well settle it in your mind that I have some method in my madness. But whether you settle it or not, pick out your place, and do it quick. Get me?"

"Oh, Dad!"

"Well?"

"Dad, I wanted to stick around one summer anyway where Windy is."

"What for?"

"Well, Dad . . . It's got my Billy . . . Windy's the only thing I care a hang about. I've got to marry that man when I grow up, or croak."

The profile of Charles gave no sign that he had heard. Below the rather formless nose, the clenched mouth held the cigar. The "undershot" jaw, cloaked somewhat too well in the material that was the thick envelope of Charles, gave the head an appearance of buttressed power above the enormous trunk on which it rested, almost without the intervention of a neck.

This would not have been like Anne Bullen's, an easy head upon the block for an accomplished headsman. It would probably have called for several whacks.

Charles did not need to look at people very much. Without moving his head, he glanced quickly and surely and was done with it. Just now, as Giulietta spoke, she thought that eye in the massive heap of profile shot sideways for a lightning instant and was done.

After a little while he said:

"What kind of a joint is that school you go to? The slang you sling around would make a toad sick!"

Charles sometimes spoke of himself as resembling that reptile in its horny variety, but if it were so, it would have been a colossal toad hammered out of granite by an Egyptian.

CHAPTER X THE GOBLIN DROPS IN FOR TEA WITH THE LADY, BUT VANISHES BEFORE THE HERO

HAVE you noticed that I adore you?" inquired Mrs. Tredegar of Giulia.

"Why?"

Helga had dropped in for tea. The dropping in had been accomplished by standing half an hour outside the window until her hostess happened to look. It was one of her peculiarities, a hesitation at doors. She would be discovered in the evening lingering by gates, or even smiling through panes. Some persons said she lurked and listened. But she did her lurking quite openly. There are some children who wait like this to be asked in, and some dogs.

"Well, first of all, because of the quality of your beauty," Helga replied. "Your strength is decorated by your fragility. I like your look of control, of a sort of passionate patience. Shall I go on?"

"Not now," said Mrs. Crawford. "Let me rest on that a while. No one ever praises me, and I find it a little harrowing."

"They don't praise you because they think you are too delicate to bear it. But you're not too delicate for anything. They think you're much more refined than you are."

"But I am rather refined. Am I not?" asked Giulia.

"Yes, but not too refined. You're splendidly tough. Still, praising you would be like praising porcelain. And very few of us have an array of porcelain words. However, doesn't Windsor praise you?"

"Why should he praise me?"

"Well, he comes alive when he sees a beautiful thing," said the guest.

"Still, he always looks reasonable before a work of art," interjected Giulia.

"But he should praise you because he *could*," pursued Mrs. Tredegar, intent upon her idea. "He has a nice sense of the admirable. And he records its presence, as is his duty. I hold that those who have the sense and the word for it have an obligation to report that the thing exists: as an eye opener for the others, you know. . . . It mustn't be done lightly, of course. He who announces that there is beauty too readily, calling out, 'Wolf, wolf!' won't be believed when the worst happens. You can't give a sheep fangs by crying you are bitten."

"You're the most unheard-of creature!" said her hostess.

"Oh, I'm unheard of," rejoined the visitor laughing.

"What do you think about *his* beauty?" Giulia inquired after a pause.

"Oh, *his!* Your husband looks like a mountain. A tavern for Titans. Cyclops could be comfortable and private reposing on his flank. . . . Beside him, Windsor is a sprite."

"But Windy is quite a big fellow," protested Giulia.

"Oh, he's a *bel-à-faire-peur*. He's as tall as Achilles. But he looks like a lame Ariel. . . . He's friendly and companionable like Ariel . . . and sulky as Achilles. . . . But I say he is 'a pleasant hand,' like Lamb's Rickman. He's an Arabian night. . . . However, isn't he a perfect victim to good taste?"

Giulia might have said, "It is I that am the perfect victim to his good taste." For him she had reduced herself to complete discipline, an order apparently incapable of revolution. Windsor disliked surprise. With her he was secure from astonishment.

"He looks on me as a barbarian," remarked Mrs. Tredegar.

"He's rather startled by what you say."

"Do you think I could mitigate in any way?" asked Helga thoughtfully. "My horrors, I mean."

"It's very arduous, mitigating one's horrors to please another," returned Giulia. "I'm afraid you couldn't do it."

"But *you* could—and did," added Mrs. Tredegar. "But surely you need not have done it to please your Charles, who is no more scrupulous than a hill."

"Sometimes one does it to please one's self," said Giulia, slightly astringent. "Sometimes we have our own little ideas upon the art of living."

"The art of living . . . ah, yes."

"You needn't say that so ruefully." Giulia spoke up with warmth. "I call you perfect in your own wild way. You don't offend my taste."

"Well, Ariel is no finer than you."

"Oh, no, I'm fine," rejoined Giulia with sad whimsicality.

"You would never rudely disobey the law," continued the other. "Or if you did, no one would be the wiser or the worse. Your disobedience would decorate the broken law. . . . Your disobedience would be as gentle, as sad, as hidden as a sigh."

Giulia eyed her guest with some pertinacity. The guest was looking out the window in innocent reflection.

"If you don't write your poems on paper, you certainly write them on our heads like hailstones. As that poetess said, in your indifferent words of everyday, you make your poem and you do not know."

"Christus! for making poetry!" laughed the other. "That's the last thing I could do. I've got the education of a twelve-years' child and can't count even on my fingers. . . . You can't make poetry unless you can count on your fingers. . . . And you can't fish books, those gladiators, from the bottom of the speechless sea. . . . You have to lunge on without the heroes."

"I should never have thought of you as an illiterate," said Giulia, giving her faint smile.

"Oh, that's because of my brother," said Mrs. Tredegar. "I mean my husband. I caught some of his rich drip in my apron. . . . Now, I hold it out for Ariel's. I'm an apron juggler."

"Beware, Ariel's terribly trivial."

"Then why do you spend so much of his time with him?" asked Helga with unconscious quaintness.

"Because I like triviality. And I spend so much of your time with him because you are so pretty together."

"Oh, we are pretty, but not together."

"Do you mean that together you are not pretty?" asked Giulia.

"No, I mean we are not together. There is nothing together about us."

"Do you know," said the other, with a rather too brilliant glance, "I believe you are the only one that could win him. . . . (No, the richest heart in the world cannot buy a poor heart," she added to herself.)

"I!" exclaimed her guest. "I never won a man in my life. I don't know any more about such things than an unborn kangaroo."

"Yet you are married."

"Oh, I'm most awfully married, and always have been from before the memory of man. But that has no relation to this sort of thing. I married my own brother."

"Your brother!"

"Well, roughly speaking, yes. *Min broder.* . . . My uncle, if you like. Let's talk of other matters."

Giulia subdued her curiosity. She rose and paced gently about. She made a great to-do in walking. At each step one subtle haunch rose and swung outward, making the conventional posture of Aphrodite with her weight on one leg. This gentle activity below the waist was well defined by the costume of the moment, fitting like a glove across the back of the hips, the alternate movements of which were like the languid sway of an adagio. The action of Helga was simple, almost epicene, in comparison: as Windsor said, "Doric."

Mrs. Tredegar was so enchanted by this phenomenon of Giulia's walking that she would glance at Windsor to see if he was aware of it. But Windsor had got done with being much aware of the phenomena that made up Giulia.

"You behave like a water lily!" exclaimed that lady's guest.

Giulia paused beside an inlaid table and sighed.

"And you are always sorrowful," continued the other. "Aren't you perfect enough?"

"What about your own perfection and your own sorrow?" asked Giulia.

"Oh, my *sorg!* That's no sorrow of refinement. There's nothing dainty about *my* sorrow. But you will die from daintiness."

Giulia sat silent, weighing the other's utterance with care. After a considerable time she said:

"And what will our neighbour Windy die of?"

"Oh, he won't die at all."

"Do you mean he'll never take the trouble?"

"You've hit it," rejoined Helga. "He's too lazy to die. He'll live because he rather likes living. It's easy for him. It doesn't matter how sickening it is, he won't be sick. That is, not spiritually sick. He'll contrive to go on smiling, because he'll decline to take notice."

"He'd be spiritually sick soon enough if any pressure were put on him," said Giulia.

"But nobody would dare to put it. The beautiful moderation of his being forbids the approach of violence or death. . . . But I like to range myself in the ranks of the helpless dead to be delivered from excess of being. Doing that, in mind I make myself more suave. He does not need to be more suave. . . . Not a breath of a breeze, the smoke riding with the ship."

"Things are not so calm with you, I take it," said the hostess.

"Gray combers splitting aboard her waist . . ." Mrs. Tredegar accepted another cup. "This is a creditable brew," she remarked. "As a rule those tea merchants are bally thimbleriggers with the leaf. They mingle in magnolia, white oleander, jasmine, and gardenia."

"Where?"

"Oh, in the yellow islands. . . ."

Presently this unconscionable woman inquired of Giulia if she had ever kissed Windsor.

"Do you think I want to kiss everybody?" cried Giulia. "Why do you ask?"

"Oh, I just wanted to know if it could be done."

"Naturally, I have not," said Giulia. "Shall you?"

"Not I. I hate all sensual pleasures, caresses, collisions. I prefer the sun's way of conveying warmth."

She went to the window and stood looking down the slope. To the left lay the village, curled in its hollow. On the opposite hill stood Windsor's house. Far below, to the right, she could see the chimneys of her own emerging from the great trees by the river.

"I think you really are a goblin," said Giulia.

"Of the goblinest. Bully bucko, I'm a ghost! Do you notice anything odd about my throat?"

"Very odd," said Giulia smiling. "It looks like a tower of ivory. . . . But what do you mean?"

"I've been hanged," said the visitor.

"For what crime?"

Mrs. Tredegar pointed to the scar on her forehead.

Giulia made a sound of fatigue and let her eyes close for a moment. The conversation had been more hazardous than her force was well able to bear. When she lifted her gaze again, she found her visitor turned from the window and regarding her with level contemplation.

"You're not as tough as I thought," said Helga. "I mustn't regale you with *galgenhumor*, gallows jokes. I begin to see there are things that don't go down with you, or Windy either. . . . But you and I mustn't be afraid of anything."

"Why do you think I'm afraid of anything?" asked the other rather hastily. Helga examined her another moment in silence, then concluded:

" 'Ware the bull! Things are ticklish with us. We must keep a weather eye out, of course. But we mustn't care a kick."

"Do you mean that things are always ticklish with sensitive organisms like ours?" Giulia inquired after a wary pause.

"Like *yours,*" returned the other. "I haven't a sensitive organism. It isn't dangers of the soul that frighten me to death."

"What does frighten you to death?" asked the hostess.

"Ah, nothing so refined."

Giulia saw that Helga did not mean to continue with an elucidation. She too went to look from the window down the deep slope to the river now streaming with cataracts of colour.

"We're having a very expensive sunset," said Helga. "We shall be bankrupts."

"Seriously," inquired her hostess, after a moment or two, "Do I seem to you to look like a person with a carking care?"

"Well, you are divinely composed, you know. But sometimes your birds go behind their leaves."

"What do you call my birds?" asked Giulia.

"Your divine eyes," returned the guest. "Careless does it! Up my bullies! Put a spot of pepper in his eye! Hoodwink, hoodwink!"

Out of the inebriating lustre of the terraces below them there now appeared a mounting shape, so drenched with fluid lustre that it seemed only a compacter centre of the prevailing light. It made the ascent with joyful weightlessness, as if it had a feathered heart inside it. One arm alone, the left, did not share in the rhythm of the advance.

The two women at the window focussed all the power of their eyes upon the newcomer, and their neighbouring breasts lifted silently with deeper breathing. They did not take the trouble to say anything to each other, but stood quietly side by side, watching that approach.

Neither was concerned with the emotional situation of the other. Helga was still uninformed of the tie that subsisted, or had subsisted, between Giulia and Windsor, and Giulia was fobbed off from alertness by her guest's very candour. So as they stood there, with a gentle touching of shoulders, each was fully occupied with her own interior business, and perspicatious as they were, unaware of that somewhat similar business in the other's breast.

"I'm off," said Mrs. Tredegar suddenly.

"Won't you wait to see him?" inquired the hostess.

"Not just this once," returned the departing guest, smiling into the extreme splendour of the west. "I've an impulse toward economy. It may never come again. . . . Thrift, thrift."

She went out and had disappeared toward the village before Windsor gained the house.

CHAPTER XI IN WHICH IT IS DISCOVERED THAT GIULIA CAN BE AFRAID

I THOUGHT the goblin was here," said Windsor, throwing down his hat and stick as he glanced about the room.

"She said she was going to economize to-day," said Giulia, "not spend you all at once."

"Oh, has she just gone?" said he carelessly. "What on earth do you mean with your economy and spending?"

"She was just here. We were watching you as you gambolled up the hill. Are you disappointed?"

"I'm a little relieved," he returned, throwing himself upon the divan with his lazy smile. "She is rather strong drink, you know."

"She was very strong to-day," admitted Giulia. "She's always hitting the bull's-eye. She cuts out the unessential so dreadfully."

"And it leaves such queer blanks when they do, doesn't it? You look rather the worse for wear." He drew her down beside him with an accustomed hand. "And you are even more beautiful in your way when you are the worse for wear."

"She said, 'Billy bucko,' if you please," Giulia informed him, and repeated some of the other singular expressions that Mrs. Tredegar had let fall.

"She isn't always so naughty nautical," said he. "I can't abide her when she is."

"I can."

"Can what?" he inquired, after a moment of abstraction.

"Abide her."

They were silent for a while, then Giulia said:

"She talks like that because she's a desperado."

"What precisely do you mean?"

"I mean, she's desperate," said Giulia. "She's been desperate; and she still is."

After they had exchanged some reflective looks, he inquired if a reason for desperation had been communicated, and received a slow shake of the head.

"Well, whatever it is, she flourishes on it."

"Oh, she flourishes," returned the lady. "But she's different from other women. She's had experiences that women don't usually have. And whatever they were, they've made her too . . ."

"Tough?"

"Well, yes," said she. "It's like muscles, perhaps. Fighter's muscles. They project. She stands entirely on her own bottom. Don't you think she's defiant?"

"You mean she doesn't give a damn?"

"Oh, she gives several damns about something."

Windsor inquired what.

"She's afraid," returned his hostess. "That's why she swaggers."

"Whistling in the churchyard?"

"She whistles like a steamboat in a fog," rejoined Giulia. "She whistles frightfully. It's ear piercing."

"Do you like her?"

There was a pause in which she sat with eyes lost through the window in the slowly waning glory of the air. He watched her with an intentness that was almost like anxiety. At last she said:

"Do you know, I believe I like her more than any creature I've ever known."

He gave a kind of still sigh and covered her hand with his. Giulia added, "But she says she's not a woman: that she doesn't know any more about the ways of women than——"

"Than what?"

"An unborn kangaroo."

This had such a strangeness coming from those unsmiling lips that Windsor was quite overcome. He was frequently forced to laugh at Giulia because she so rarely laughed. The gravity of her countenance in some situations verged upon the ridiculous through sheer anomaly.

But when he inquired how they had happened to be talking of the ways of women, she did not tell him that she had asked Mrs. Tredegar if she meant to kiss him. Sylvia would have done so, for she had not Giulia's fine sense of expediency.

Sylvia was not careful of Windsor, for she had safely lost him. Giulia was, because she remained in the precarious situation of one still in possession of the prize, at least of the casket that had contained the prize. Sylvia could sing before the robber in the security of her empty pockets, but Giulia went warily.

In the long course of their alliance she had been robbed perhaps twice; or, rather, he had been borrowed from her. But with killing efforts of the will she had concealed her anguish. Her persistent fear of fatiguing him sealed her reproaches in impregnable silence where they had raved themselves mutely out.

The quiet sadness that was the habit of her face, changing almost imperceptibly under stress of either joy or pain, masked her sorrows with its unvarying beauty. So, never having made him a scene, nor left a cicatrice of rebuke upon him, she had always found him returning to her as to sanctuary. In fact, he had given her that beautiful name. The loveliness of her person, of her house, of the majestic view from her windows, gave him sanctuary from the stupefying trap of his existence. And this in spite of the scarcely recognized fact that in reality she did not interest him very much. She did not interest anyone very much, save a single person.

Charles, her husband, was never weary of speculation about her. His thoughts hung round her like pearls upon a queen. It may have been that this assiduous fealty made a depreciatory comment upon his critical quality. Or it may have been that his perception of the exquisite was less fallible than that of his contemporaries in that circle; but the fact remained that, where others had concluded there was nothing much to arrest attention, this heavy man was all attention: he remained on tiptoe.

Meanwhile, with Windsor, Giulia rode her cavalier with a loose rein, though it cost her more than the most vigorous of holds upon the bit. And she profited. She made a point of asking nothing, and she got, at least, a presence.

And the priceless presence asked nothing. He made no inquiry. If he had met the soul of Giulia stripped of her exteriors in some space of naked truth, he might have inquired, "Who is this lady?"

Now, after Mrs. Tredegar's visit to Giulia, he was saying to that lady as he leaned very gently against her shoulder, playing with her girdle:

"I suppose it is a quaint weakness, but I like good behaviour. You have always behaved."

She smiled, thinking of a dread that lay like invisible points of weakness along her nerves, cords that *could* give way, snap and fall in a tangled mass of wreckage.

"I really don't enjoy people with highly obvious blots on their scutcheons," he pursued, "or if they must have them, I'd rather not see them wearing their blots quite all over their sleeves."

"But she is the most amusing creature, isn't she? She says such remarkable things."

"I really don't think I like to hear people saying remarkable things," he returned. "It's like banging about, and women, above all, to be agreeable, shouldn't bang about."

"The other day," put in Giulia, "she said that women among men's ideals of them were bulls in the china shop. . . . Has it occurred to you again to kiss her?"

"No."

They rose, lightly holding each other, went to the window and looked down toward Helga's house. Through the dusk in the trees, a lamp was suddenly lit in her bedroom.

"Whatever *does* she do down there?"

"Whatever she does, it's completely preposterous," said he.

"She's an elf in our china shop," mused Giulia.

"An elephant, you mean."

"And I can be a mammoth," thought Giulia. She knew so well that she did not always behave. Wonderful that she had got through all these intimate years beside Windsor without his knowing—got through by the skin of her teeth. She, the perfect woman, had powers of not behaving that gave her secret dread.

She was mortally afraid of being pressed too far in her endurance. She was afraid, because under a too stringent nervous stress she could actually seem to lose her good sense. The intolerable thing was that she could become *silly*. Giulia was most un-silly in her normal condition. She had plenty of good, cool reason. And this possibility of becoming silly was horrid to her.

She had done it several times in her girlhood when she had a bulldozing mother always upon her. And she had done it once with Charles.

The bulldozing mother had bulldozed her into marrying the "horned toad." (Their resources had dwindled to a ticklish extreme.)

Then Giulia had started upon the supreme task of violating her nature. She really liked Charles, or what might be called the soul of Charles. But to live in the married state with that uncouth exterior tested her nervous resistance beyond its strength. Uncouth. So kind, so shy, so worshipping, so sorry, so uncouth. Everything that was Giulia was the farthest from the uncouth. But Giulia's sense of fairness, of the sporting, was particularly fine. So she took up that supreme task. She honestly tried to wed her porcelain to his pot.

Windsor was hard by, a fitting mate for porcelain, but she would not see him. She assiduously studied the beauties of her pot's soul. She forced herself even to praise the substance of her pot's exterior. The pot was a rude lamp that held a sacrificial flame, but alas, there was no alabaster translucence of material.

The incantation of the priest was breathed through a raucous reed. His horrid voice . . . saying simple, holy things!

Touch. It was the touch that had slain her courage. Touch. The sight of her own hand—her speaking hand, mutely prehensile round his head, the square obstruction of his large head, rooted without a neck upon the suffocating bulk of his shoulders. Her hand that could have been so eloquent in love, that was so adapted to fine textures, forms . . .

His hair, that forlorn hair, rising heavenward in spikes. She fainted when she saw her eloquent docile hand smoothing spikes.

So, after a little while, she had done that thing her virtuous mind abhorred. Through the insupportable carnage of her senses she had seen her virtuous mind give way. Her cool just mind was pouring confusion down her tongue.

Paltry disgrace of thought and speech. Welter of unwisdom and injustice. Revolt without honour. The natural stateliness of her being, love-abused, was utterly broken down. She lay there in his most wretched arms, weeping and telling lies. She had always told lies to her mother in these ruined moments. The proud truthful creature lied like a dog in her extremity. Some cowering oblique Helot in her ancestry got her tongue. Weeping . . . saying silly things. Seething with silly projects of escape . . . Silly.

And that was the end. She had not been able to hold out one year. He could only say, "Poor thing, poor thing!"

When she was calmer, being out of his hands, she said, "Little Jeremiah."

So she had named the idiot child of a poor family that lived on a road by which Charles had often driven her in his car.

This tiny ragged driveller was always on the ground in front of the cabin, occupied with making a little construction of pebbles and weeping all the time. His people said he never ceased that quiet crying even when he was asleep. And as he worked he would sob out incessantly, "I'm building a house, I'm building a house."

"Little Jeremiah," she repeated.

"Don't cry any more," Charles had said. "Your house is built . . . safe."

CHAPTER XII IN WHICH A LADY SHOCKS HER HUSBAND BY PRETENDING TO BE ASLEEP: A WORTHY GENTLEMAN HAS A QUAINT TEMPTATION AND LAMENTS INADEQUACY

IT WAS Monday morning and the Reverend George was meditating a sermon. He began early, so as to reflect upon it all the week.

He rose every morning with the lark and said his orisons while making the fire in the kitchen. He put the kettles on and prepared the porridge for his children.

Now he carried kindling and wood to his wife's room and, going in on tiptoe, shut the window and started the blaze in her little fireplace. He put the tin tub on the hearth to warm, placed the metal pitcher in readiness, and laid the towels and sponges on the handy bench.

She had not waked, for as usual she had been roused a good many times in the night. The baby was asleep on her arm. Her bed was surrounded by cribs.

He did not examine the face of Rosemary on the pillow, chiselled by excessive love, suffering, and anxiety. He had got through with examining it. One glance at her delicately tarnished beauty was enough, like one glance at a lost hope.

No use in looking now, he vaguely felt rather than thought, now when she was like a votive mask of marble on a tomb. When she woke there would be that gaiety. She would begin laughing with her cockadoodledoo laughter at the antics of the children. This unfaceable solemnity would be dispelled, like that pale mist outside the window which clung to the walls and boughs, obscuring the fun of flowers, the darting and laughter of birds.

Moving silently, he arranged the little garments of the children, placing the appurtenances of each more precisely in juxtaposition to the crib they belonged to. He had a slight habitual vexation over Rosemary's not being able to bear the practicality of this in mind.

"Heaps, heaps!" he thought. "Dire, dreadful heaps!"

He repented of his annoyance and cried inwardly, "Poor dear! Oh, poor dear!" He wished the baby were not cuddled against her, so that he might lie down by her side and take her in his arms.

He looked with adoration and revolt at the impending children. The three cribs stood like mute obstinate sentinels between him and his love. They were placed in her room for the economy of fire and for the nightly hovering. The eldest boy alone slept apart, isolated, proud, and forlorn. But he would come in here to dress. He would come nonchalantly, yawning, as if the chill of his isolation had been nothing, his eyes rushing to his mother.

Presently, they would all be awake. There would be a bedlam of bathing, brushing, finding of clothes, doing on of little breeches and boots.

That strange woman, Mrs. Tredegar, came there sometimes, to look curiously at his children. He was sensitive about the disorder in which his family lived, without benefit of proper servants.

He picked up a pair of infinitesimal shoes and contemplated the aperture that had almost penetrated the sole. He reverted to the idea of money, of doctor's bills, of the grocer, of a mortgage.

It was a pity that the town thought it could get on so well without spiritual guidance. A negligible luxury for which it allowed such a pittance. Two could have lived on it in graceful moderation, with books, etcetera, not seven, five of whom could not be produced without exorbitant nurses and doctors.

Six?

He turned sharply toward the bed and bent a look of piercing inquiry at its mysterious occupant. She lay breathing gently, the baby's curls vibrating a little with the lifting and falling of her breast. She seemed so harmless.

As he looked, she drew a longer quivering respiration and released it in the slow sob of fatigue and anxiety in sleep.

And then, he had an uncanny feeling. He had experienced this strangeness once in a railway station at night. He had been looking idly at a fellow traveller asleep on a bench. And the man had waked without opening his eyes.

It had been a curiously disturbing thing. The knowledge that the stranger lying there was no longer asleep . . . it had come with a still shock.

Though there had not been the slightest change of position, it was as if the body had tightened, had become wary. Something had ceased that had been; something that had affected the looker-on like a scarcely perceptible continuous vibration, as of the blood going carelessly through the veins.

There was an impression of suddenly and secretly resumed caution, as if even the heart were listening. The eyes did not unclose, but inquiry and defense proceeded from within.

The Reverend George now felt the soul of his wife awake and in ambush. It had not been ready to gather itself to meet him. He thought, "Poor love, she is too tired to speak yet." But he did not succeed in evading a momentary shocked sense of her hiding from him, of alienation.

He turned almost stealthily away and went out of the room as if he were not aware that she had waked.

He went down to the kitchen, saw that the kettles were going industriously, and made the porridge. He swept the hearth of the flakes of ashes and chips, then looked into the "Reception

Room" where the little maid was sweeping. She was about fifteen years old, and the daughter of Mrs. Chick, the wash- and scrub-woman of Mrs. Tredegar. Her little perfect body was as hard and resilient as India rubber. She moved with easy strength, as pretty and round and stalwart as a tiny bull.

Before she came to them she had done odd jobs at The River House, and on the occasion of his one visit to Mrs. Tredegar, he had first seen the youngster. It was morning, and she had brought her rosiness in from the path that led up the slopes to her mother's field.

As she entered, Mrs. Tredegar had cried out:

"Oh, bright, bright, bright!"

He had been rather startled, never before having heard a mistress salute her servant in this mode. But the daughter of Mrs. Chick was not startled. She had been smiling before, and she went on smiling.

"She has the pontifical face of a kitten," Mrs. Tredegar had said. "A little flat mug full of supernal innocence and power."

He had just been elucidating for Mrs. Tredegar one or two of the major fallacies of papistry. He detested doing it, but she had strangely assumed that he was a Catholic priest. She had taken it as a bit of news that there were other sorts. But he had generously assured her that they all served the same Master, although in slightly different fashions.

"Oh, yes," she had rejoined. "I've heard a good joke about that. . . . One of one kind said to one of the other, 'We both serve Him. You in your way, and I in—His.' "

The Reverend George had said rather sternly:

"I'm afraid you are not even a Papist, Mrs. Tredegar."

"Ouch! The foul fiend bites my back!" was her surprising rejoinder.

He had rebuked her levity and she had rejoined.

"There's nothing so grave as the perch of the foul fiend."

"Perch?"

"The grave rascal on whose back he sits."

She had looked quite grave when she said it, but, he thought, rather rascally.

He had not liked her very much, but he had offered up a brief interior prayer that he might understand her better. He often felt that there was some fault in his understanding, and with this lady he felt it more than usual.

As he stood in the door of the "Reception Room" recalling these things, the daughter of Mrs. Chick was squatting on the floor, extracting dust from under the desk strewn with notes for his next sermon, and a heap of manuscript for a book he was writing, to be called "Love."

He hoped this work would bring him in enough to rid him of his debts and to hire a nursery governess to ease the cares of Rosemary.

The publisher of religious works who awaited it had said it was a good title, a subject that was always a good seller—in moderation, of course. But it was hard to complete it in the hullabaloo of the pastoral home.

George had no study, and if he had possessed one, neither he nor Rosemary was possessed of the granite will that keeps children out.

The daughter of Mrs. Chick was smiling with innocent joy at finding herself getting the dust from under the desk, a childlike delight in the unusual. Suddenly she turned that delight full up at him, the roseate smile of a yawning kitten.

Then, doubtless out of respect, she rose from the squatting position and merely bent over, attaining her dust with a more indisputable grace.

Without warning, the Reverend George was surprised by an untoward feeling that he would rather like to give her a hearty spank such as he sometimes joyously administered, in passing, to his own toddling infants. He felt her youthful person would rebound like India rubber.

He turned hastily away, and going to the kitchen, again fed the fire. He placed the kitchen door open so that the increasing warmth might permeate the house. These spring mornings were chill, and he and Rosemary had paroxysms of terror at a matutinal chorus of infant sneezes.

George made the coffee and cooked himself a dish of eggs with sausages like a litter of jolly little pigs. Rosemary did not eat meat. She breakfasted on porridge with the children.

He ate with vigour, for he had a pure, well functioning carcase, as he called it. . . . "This poor carcase dead but for thy informing spirit, O Lord . . ."

While he consumed the dish, he wished that he had his notes for his new sermon from the "Reception Room," so that he might be meditating upon them. Still, perhaps it was better to eat in peace. The edifice of digestion had its simple rights.

And Mrs. Chick's daughter was still messing about in there.

But he had to beard her. He was compelled to snatch those notes from that desk, carry them to his cold bedroom, and get something done before he must help Rosemary wash and dress the children. If Rosemary had only been a little more adequate—a real housekeeper like Sylvia Windsor (although it was rather a cross that Sylvia should come quite so often to tidy up the children and "play mother" with the baby).

He repelled the disloyalty and murmured interiorly, "Rosemary, poor dear! The poor, poor love!"

He had come back to the thing that bled perpetually inside him. His sense of the predicament—the universal plight of women—into which he had plunged his love.

Passing the daughter of Mrs. Chick with an air of austerity, he went up with the notes. He was very unhappy.

He had ended his last sermon so lamely yesterday. It had been such a treasured sermon, entitled, "Not a sparrow falleth." And it had been enriched by beautiful names, Mary, John, Francis, Teresa, Augustine. He had been unusually eloquent for a long time, entreating his people to go to Nature for proof of the Nursing Love, to the blissful career of birds, the unviolated life of plants, the furry security of little beasts. He had not mentioned drought and tempests; nor beaks, browzing, fangs, claws, crunching, carnivoraciousness: any of the more startling facts of preying life. These seemed beside the point. Not a sparrow fell. He had breakfasted on a lamb, and he was strong with love.

He had felt the tears in his own eyes and seen them in two or three pairs before him, and he had risen to greater heights than he had yet achieved, he thought, cramming his tender argument with passionate quotations from bygone lovers of The Idea.

And then, at the very best of it, when the heartbreaking sweetness of the proposition was most proved, and he had his peroration on his tongue, he had finished, fumbling. He had ended with:

"And so . . . you see . . . that is how it is."

The ludicrous sentence now said itself over and over in his head. He couldn't get rid of it, and the blush would go thrilling up his cheek.

He did not know how it was, but every now and then, in preaching, his eloquence would give out. He would find, inexplicably, that he had nothing more to say.

It was a secretly gnawing distress, for he felt that a worthy servant of the Word should always have something more to say.

Sometimes he prayed, rather hopelessly, that this deficiency might help him to keep humble. It was so hard to keep sufficiently humble when one happened to be a shepherd and not a sheep. The sheep looked up to one so.

His handsome, healthy countenance took on trouble. His large innocent eyes concentrated on the problem of holding out better in this new discourse. He had selected the subject, "Sell all and follow Me," and it was proving more ticklish than he had foreseen.

His was a simple and honest spirit. He would have been so relieved if, like Paul in his old age, he might reduce his admonitions to the one so dear, so simple, so releasing formula, "Little children, love one another." As things were, he was perpetually in hot water.

He really must remember to put in that bit about damnation. He must hunt out the notes he had made for it. It wasn't that he did not believe with a humble heart in what the Church required of one to believe on the subject. It was simply that the modern mind forgot all about it so readily. . . . What was going to become of the modern mind? He must attend to that in his next sermon. No, not the very next. That was to be upon the Apocalypse. It was really odd that such an important matter as eternal punishment should slip one's memory so.

He stood a moment, praying for enlightenment. He felt himself a priest, and he prayed aloud as he did in church, with the proper phrases and a sort of tune.

"It is truly meet and just, right and availing unto salvation that we should always and in all places give thanks unto Thee, Holy Lord, Father Almighty, who by fasting of the body dost curb our vices, dost lift up our minds," etc.

He made his bed, turning the mattress properly, like a good housewife, then sat down on the edge and ranged his notes on the coverlet. It would have been so much easier in the sitting room at his desk. But there was Mrs. Chick's daughter, round and jolly as a sausage.

He closed his eyes a moment. Then he worked with all his heart. And as he worked, his kind, trusting face assumed a look of torment.

Suddenly he knelt down at the side of the bed and extinguished his head in his arms. He began to pray in the homely childish fashion that was his secret way with his Liege, unlike the classic formula of his public prayers.

"I don't believe I can say these things any more. . . . Let me do kindness to Thy lambs, O Lord, but don't ask me to go on talking about these matters. I haven't got the talent for it, I'm afraid. My tongue is not in flame . . . I mean, I really can't think of much to say on Thy subjects, O my dear Lord. Don't tell me it's because they don't interest me, or that I am losing faith, O my Darling! But if you could just let me off from all this talk . . ."

He was interrupted by the crying of the children in the neighbouring room. Why should the littler ones always awake in sorrow—that ancestral sorrow! He ran to the rescue of Rosemary.

CHAPTER XIII UPON MATTERS OF RELENTING AND THE HEART

LATER in the day Mrs. Tredegar, coming up from the river slopes, met the Reverend George on his way to perform a charitable deed.

He watched her as she came, and thought that with her vague eyes, so narrow as to be almost closed, she looked like a somnambulist—a somnambulist in a hurry part of the time, and part of the time in no hurry at all.

He also thought, "She walks like a wolf." She had a way, when she was alone, of going with her shoulders crouched forward, almost as if she were smelling the ground. He thought, she looks like a hunter, or the hunted. A wolf, of course, is both.

She stopped before she came to him and seemed completely lost in a muse. He also stopped, or, rather, slowed his pace. Her absent hands were making small folds in her skirt, and he was afraid she might lift it too high. It was climbing above her knee as it was, and the knees were bare. The stockings were rolled down and filleted below. He thought of the knees of various sculptures of antiquity.

Now she evidently felt the presence of something. A clump of verdure was between them, yet an edge of the Reverend George was already visible. She first, however, looked behind her.

He remembered Giulietta's saying, "She thinks something's after her. . . . If you watch her when she's alone, you're sure to see her look back."

Now Mrs. Tredegar came on, and her shoulders relented their crouch. George thought, she is holding herself too straight now. She is defining her breasts unnecessarily.

"How do you do, Father," said Mrs. Tredegar, not noticing his protest at the title. "After you were at my house, I thought a good deal about the seraphic character of your heart and of those of my two other pet priests."

"Pet priests?"

"I wanted to tell you about them, since we were on the subject. There was a Norwegian bishop. I think he lived in the eighteenth century, but how can a houseless ghost get at these household matters? One doesn't find Britannicas between the wings of petrels. He got drunk every night, and he was a poet: a devilish good one, if you can believe the sea-eyed people. He used to come home every night from the tavern on his hands and knees and in that attitude write his poem on the kitchen floor of brick. His housekeeper kept a piece of chalk handy. You can imagine him backing as he wrote, on all fours, the broad beam of him, backing before the lines he was setting down. Can't you?"

The Reverend George backed a little.

"Then, having finished, he paddled quadrupedly off to bed," continued Mrs. Tredegar. "And in the morning the housekeeper copied the poem, washed the bricks, and put the chalk handy for the next night. Well, she is one of my pet priests. I'll tell you about the other another day."

She was starting on, but George called to her that he would rather hear at once. He felt he would rather not have "another day" hanging over him.

"The other," said she, stopping, "the other is my dearest. He was a little old curé in the south of France, and I can vouch for him, as the wind vouches for the sweet grass, touched, touched, oh, touched in passing. . . . Well, one day he began to feel that for some time he had not mentioned the matter of hell frequently enough to his congregation. So he looked up all the data he could get at and compounded a tremendous sermon about it. To make up for his neglect he thundered. The sweat poured off him, he toiled, he moiled; he dug damnation. He presented it to them on pitchforks. He spitted them with it. He broiled, boiled, fried, roasted, sizzled, browned them. He ovened them to a turn, shouting all the time, 'You must believe this to be saved.' . . . Then, pausing at last to mop his brow, he looked up over his streaming spectacles, which had been bent for two hours upon his data, and saw that his people were weeping. . . . He cried out, '*Ne pleurez pas, mes petits enfants, ce n'est pas vrai.*' "

The Reverend George translated the last to himself with careful lips. "Do not weep, my little children, it is not true."

By the time he had got it right, Mrs. Tredegar had passed on her way up the slope.

He went on toward his charitable deed, his innocent eyes fixed on the ground. To right and left sprang into his lowered view frail petals of spring and young grass just putting up its little banners. As the wind vouches for the sweet grass, she vouched for him. Had she really said it . . . and seen him, heard him? The heart of George lifted with relief, a letting out. Even if it had been through that strange, perhaps unworthy woman—even so . . . He felt that for a long time his heart had been a stone: a troubled stone. He began to pray in the homely fashion he used in secret with his Liege:

"Forgive me, Dear, if this be henceforth my pet priest, too," he whispered. "Oh, let me loose from dread theology! Oh, my dearest Love, just let me love."

The charitable deed he had intended passed out of his head. He wandered into another course, descended to the river and returned, sometimes clasping his hands over his heart. His lips moved in the homely speech of his private prayers. He moved, gently, with a feeling that his heart so turned to water might spill over on the ground.

"Oh, my heart! my heart!" he prayed again. "Take Thou the cup of my heart and carry it. It is too full for my little hands. . . . *Ne pleurez pas, mes petits enfants, ce n'est pas vrai.* . . . There is no anger, *mes petits enfants.* He, my Love, He is carrying our little hearts. . . . He is not angry. He is carrying our hearts in their little cups."

Without volition, his feet began to lead him back toward his home. He saw the head of Rosemary bowed above what lay in her lap. Rays of light seemed emanating from that immemorial attitude. "*Jolie comme un cœur,*" he murmured, one bit of French starting up another in his memory, rather trivial for the occasion, but so sweet. "Pretty as a heart." Beautiful unspeakably, beautiful as a heart.

CHAPTER XIV A GENTLE LADY SLAYS ANOTHER IN HER IMAGINATION

THE charitable deed that the Reverend George had forgotten because of his heart was to have been a visit to Sylvia Windsor.

The fairylike creature was waiting for him beside her little tea table, and she had brushed her pale hair straight back from her forehead so as not to tempt him.

She was thinking of the purity of his spirit and her own. She was so thankful now that she had never been—well—defiled by a real marriage with Windsor. She saw for a moment that perpetual smile which one could never be sure about. Cynic. She had learned the word from the Reverend George and thought it had something to do with sin.

Her simplicity was great. She had the brain of a bird, with a bird's admirable, exact, and rigorous genius for the construction of nests.

She rose and made once more the round of her rooms. There was nothing to readjust. The furniture was in perfect condition, much more perfect than it had been when heaven had confided it to her care . . . Windsor's mother resigning that care with an alacrity almost unbecoming in a female.

The old lady sat in state upstairs, reduced by Time and painless indisposition to a sedentary existence. Sylvia would rather have had her not there. She would have wished her not there very much if the aged invalid had not provided a fertile field for the exercise of her daughter-in-law's virtues.

Sylvia flew to the old lady's nest at regular intervals carrying worms of creature comfort. There never could have been an old lady so sedulously fed and tidied up.

There were no books about to disturb the divine order of Sylvia's rooms. She had a horror of these impediments because people *would* take them up and put them down again in other places. Windsor, however, was not baffled by books. So they were all in his study where he knew how to deal with them.

Sylvia wondered what was delaying the Reverend George. She had the little buttered scones he liked keeping hot for him.

She rose again and looked at herself in a mirror. At the top of it there was a little view painted on the glass—a cottage with a weeping willow over it. It was signed, "Stedfast Windsor aged 19" with the date, 1810.

"Just one," said Sylvia, pulling out a single curl from her severely arranged coiffure. She patted it over her temple.

"*That* can't hurt him."

She did not quite like her forehead. "Bulbous. Like a Pekinese!"

It had been very noble in her to brush back the little ringlets that inevitably shadowed this feature, all for the good of a man's soul.

She went to the window and looked out.

Prince Igor, the peacock, recently bereaved of his mate, was pacing on the lawn, uttering his lament.

To the right, below this trim lawn, was the village, hiding under its famous old elms. It lay in a gentle valley. On the opposite hill loomed the stately house of the Crawfords. It was the house where Giulia had been born, but there was nothing to be seen now of that old structure. Charles had "built on" so opulently—keeping of course, to the Colonial style.

"Still, it is not intact like mine." Sylvia always said this to herself when the pang of habitual envy had subsided. And she never said "ours" of Windsor's house. He used to smile when she said "my house." But, as he was always smiling, that was neither here nor there.

Quite in the village street with its arching elms sat the "pure Colonial" mansion of the Worthingtons, with its columned doorways. Next door was the dear little house of the Reverend George with all the children inside, like little birds in a nest.

Then there was the church with its spire above the trees. The other church was not very important, and the Catholic chapel beyond, with its Italian priest, not important at all. The street ended at the "Duck Pond," with old gentlemen on benches round it. Very low, down the long wooded slope, past the graveyard, on the river bank among enormous trees, the roofs and chimneys of The River House were just visible. Beyond loomed the lifting hills and distant mountain. . . . What would that terrible, tough Mrs. Tredegar be doing down there by the river? What frightful thing was she doing this minute? Sylvia brightened with curiosity. Whatever that woman might be up to was driving Matilda Johnson into "conniptions."

No, she wasn't down there. She was mounting the slope on her long tough legs, her shoulders crouched, and muzzle down like a dog smelling his way. Toward Giulia's. Now, she was looking over here . . . to catch a glimpse of Windy, of course. Let her have her glimpse. Mrs. Windsor's soul was set on higher things. The terrible woman would find him at Giulia's. Let the two fight it out. They could have him and welcome . . . and his smile.

What was that awful thing Mrs. Tredegar had said to the Reverend George? She could hear the very accent—that not-quite-English accent.

"Well, Father, you know that nowadays the Infinite is becoming scientifically respectable."

It had seemed so irreligious, so unwomanly. Sylvia could see the pain on the kind face of the clergyman.

How beautiful had been his sermon that week. "Not a sparrow falleth."

A charming little cat was sitting on the window sill, outside the screen. It mentioned being invited in, opening the rosy shell of its mouth, decorated with tiny translucent teeth and fangs like exquisite whetted poinards.

"No, tant tome in," said Sylvia, tapping the wire screen with her finger, her little breast yearning for the soft delicious creature. "Tant tome in. Hairy-wary widdle-tail!"

The thought of a bit of fur on her cushions was unbearable. She would put on her apron and nurse the kitten out of doors, talking baby-talk to it and wishing it were a baby. She wanted the Reverend George's babies with passionate wanting.

She knew, if she had but a free hand, she could train them to be neat as cherubs in their habits. As it was . . . Poor Rosemary! As for neatness, you simply have it or you haven't it . . . like the piano. Sylvia had never had the piano, though harried through all her youth by music teachers like wild beasts. "A perfect martyr . . . all my life . . . from the word go." One way or another. Tortured but steadfast in the midst of the gnashing of teeth. The Reverend George was very late. She glanced at the grandfather clock. She fell into deep meditation.

If Rosemary could die . . . without any pain, of course . . . coma . . . it was called . . . in a sort of coma . . . in childbirth . . . in a state of coma . . . Sylvia watching over her . . . oh, so tenderly, so efficiently, but very, very pale . . . efficient . . . Knowing as always just what to do . . . "visit my sick" . . . George had seen her by many a sickbed . . . couldn't believe his eyes . . . "Such endurance in daintiness," he had said.

There had been a little china bulldog on the mantel. "Just like this," he had said, "porcelain, but a bulldog." He made everything so clear.

Rosemary dying without the slightest pain . . . Sylvia so pale . . . but holding out . . . her tiny hands having made the house and children so unusually neat . . . no sleep for nights and nights . . . so patient . . . always knowing just what to do . . . as with Windy's wretched stomach . . . Ingrate . . . and when the pipe's burst . . . Rosemary dying without the slightest pain . . . The baby saved by Sylvia's promptness . . . immediate warm bath . . . never spilling a drop on anything

. . . warm towels . . . oxygen . . . respiration . . . "first aid" . . .

"This is your baby, Sylvia. You, only you, only you, only you could have saved it. Only *you,* only YOU!" She was weeping for Rosemary, soothed by George . . . Sylvia found that there were really tears in her eyes and that she was really sorry.

"Always a fanciful little thing!" she said, getting up and going again to the window. She was not shocked at herself for having killed off a neighbour, for shock is not shock without the element of surprise, and we cannot be much surprised at our own thoughts, those old hobnobbers in the taverns of consciousness: the gibbering caravans of images that pass and repass interminably through the deserts of the brain. We make a mechanical protest out of the store of formulas we hoard to keep our fancies in some sort of decent order. We laugh, or don't bother so much as to laugh. "Heavens, what *am* I up to! . . . Poor old John!" when we have skillfully disposed of an uncle in reverie: or "Crazy idea!" when we have laurelled ourselves with grandeur.

Sylvia remembered gratefully that she could not commit the murder of a moth without pangs. She tried to remember also what the dreadful Mrs. Tredegar had said about the scientific old gentleman who discovered that the essence of two or three harmless herbs, when combined, created a deadly poison. He was perfectly delighted, Mrs. Tredegar had said, and tried the concoction on himself with the greatest glee.

In dying, he had expressed satisfaction at the success of the experiment, and said that he didn't mind in any case, because he was tired of the idiotic notions that were always fiddling about in his head.

"He was a great scientist," Sylvia reflected, "and he too had idiotic notions." She felt quite set up and scientific.

She began to suffer at George's delay. She forced herself away from the window. It would not be well for his soul to catch her watching for him too eagerly. Still, she might let out one more little curl—quite a little one.

A man in his profession should learn to be strong. He *was* strong. There had never been . . . anything, but those kind hands taking hers with such sorrow for her plight.

"Simply can't *bear* that bulb!" she said, before the mirror, loosening all the curtaining curls. "Just a *little* distance of manner will do as well. . . . Anyway, there would be no spiritual victory for him, resisting me when I am bulbous."

She walked to and fro among her household treasures, lightly, delicately, not "barging into" things, as Jackie said. There was your fellow for barging in! What a pity he should go on living with them. He didn't need to be near the mill. There was Baldwin, the manager on the spot, and Windy. The Boston office was the proper place for Jackie. But wild horses couldn't drag him away from where he could get his "look" at Rosemary, as old Mr. Brewster called it. Pity he hadn't got his Rosemary in the first place!

The furniture was so solidly good. So many Colonial pieces, as well as the less cherished but thoroughly nice objects she called Louis Philippish, not being quite sure.

"Is that a tratch!" she exclaimed, examining a "Chippendalish" leg for a possible abrasion. "No, no titten tratches. Tittens outside in booful darden."

She shook a loving finger at the little cat on the sill, which had resigned the idea of entering and gone diligently to sleep, that is, with a subsiding diligence of unapplauded purrs.

If Sylvia had a baby, it would *have* to be inside. She imagined keeping it in a sort of corral in an upper room, like a calf. If it only wouldn't learn to walk. Toddling babies put paddies on furniture. She shuddered and yearned.

She felt the Reverend George's baby in her arms. Her eyes fell upon the spotless damask of an "Empirish" chair. She sighed, and gave up the baby, resigning herself with some gratitude to the Divine Will.

The "Divine Will" brought back that beautiful sermon of last Sunday to her mind. "Not a sparrow falleth," and God taking such good care of everybody, even snakes and hippopotamuses.

The dusk drew down its gentle curtain upon the tranquil drama of the day and put away the scene. The lights had appeared in Giulia's house. Mrs. Tredegar had gone down the slope again on her long tough legs.

Windy would soon be coming across the valley with that formidable lightness and that cruel smile: one arm swinging gaily, the other not swinging at all. Or would he stay at Giulia's? She almost passionately wished he would. If she could only have the house without him always . . . and without Jackie and the old lady.

Sylvia must run upstairs and tidy her for dinner, and she didn't like to be tidied. Those perpetual trays going up! What a crumby old thing the dear old thing was!

How grateful she should be for that untiring care. But was she? Flippant. Deplorably light minded. If she had only been a proper old lady. It would be so much easier to sacrifice one's self if one could feel—well—some little reverence.

The Reverend George had not been able to come. His duties. He alone fully understood *her* devotion to duty. He would come to-morrow and tell her what had happened. That beautiful, beautiful sermon! Not a sparrow falleth. She distinctly heard his rich voice uttering those last impressive words: "And so you see . . . that is how it is." He made everything so clear.

CHAPTER XV CONTAINING AMONG OTHER DROLLERIES, A MESSAGE FROM THE DEAD

It was morning in The River House. Michael, once the valet of the dead Tredegar, was kneeling beside his bed reading a tattered letter. His room was in the loft over the barns and arcade of farm necessaries, and his window was beset by pigeons. What with the cooing of the pigeons and the lapping of the river, the place was involved in a perpetual lull.

Michael was partly dressed, in undershirt, scapular, and drawers, so far, and was about to say his matins. It was his habit, before he began, to read this letter while on his knees.

It bore a date of twenty-five years ago, and it was from a neighbour in Wicklow telling of the death of Michael's young wife. The neighbour was also a long time since deceased, but Michael kept the letter always by him, in a rusty little pocketbook in his trousers pocket along with an English shilling, a rosary, a Sacred Heart of kid, a medal of the Immaculate Conception, and a wedding ring.

The letter ran, in part:

> Oh, Mike, I was after saying to her to make her gay, "It's a fine bait of money your man do be sending you from America,"

> but the voice of her crying out, *"I'd rather have the loan of him to-night!"* And she weeping and crying with big tears, and me saying husheen, hushoo.

The letter went on to say that Michael's wife had been weeping hard as she died. So for twenty-five years, just before his prayers, morning and night, Michael always reread the letter, on his knees. He couldn't get over the strangeness of the idea of an active weeping while she consummated that quiet deed.

He now finished dressing and went about his morning tasks. And by and by he stood at the door of his new mistress, knocking. He made a point of getting ahead of Mrs. Johnson to awaken Mrs. Tredegar, for he felt it better that the first voice heard in the morning should not be lugubrious. That brought bad luck.

"Open that door, you, in there!" he called out in a jolly voice. "Here's a nice set of bills for you by the morning post."

He heard Mrs. Tredegar rise, turn the lock, draw the heavy bolt, and get back into bed. Then he went in, laid the letters on the table, and returned to the doorway. He was accoutred with an old apron of the housekeeper's, a broom, some cloths, a mop, and a bucket.

"Are you going to stay in bed all day, Miss? A great healthy girl like you ought to be up and about on her fine legs enjoying the works of God in the morning. . . . And it's high time your room was done, if I'm ever going to get rid of my forenoonities."

He leaned against the doorpost in a genial attitude, and Helga contemplated him from her pillow. She had slipped on a long Chinese coat of blue with golden dragons. It was in tatters. The two cats, Blinko and Little David, curled at the foot of the bed, roused, stretched, and went down to breakfast by way of the window and a honeysuckle vine.

There was no sign of feminine comfort in the room. To Michael's familiar eye it was more bleak than in the uncle's time, for the old man had left things about in disorder, which at least gave a look of habitancy to the place. Now it had the destitute aspect of a hotel room, unrelieved by womanly appurtenances.

There were no slippers by the bedside. A worn pair of sandals were placed with precision in front of a chair, as if an invisible person sitting there were wearing them; and with equal precision Mrs. Tredegar's doffed garments were arranged on the seat and back of the chair with a look of method such as, Michael thought, might be employed by firemen with a view to a hasty resumption. Her hat, raincoat, pocketbook, umbrella, and walking stick were ranged in the same practical manner on a table near the door.

On the dressing table which had been indicated to her by Mrs. Johnson on her first arrival there was no spread of the usual things on dressing tables, but a small valise stood there, open. Some toilet articles were visible inside. She had declined to have her trunk emptied and removed to the attic. It remained a black obstruction, lightsome to look at as a sarcophagus.

Mrs. Johnson reported that she had caught her mistress putting small bundles of things in the most unlikely places, when she had explained, "No one will think of looking there. And yet I can find them in a hurry."

"What's going to be your hurry?" Mrs. Johnson had inquired.

"Ah, that depends on the panting of ships . . . I mean the ships that are ashore on perilous hills."

"I see," said Mrs. Johnson, hurrying to the safety of the kitchen.

Now Michael was taking in the rigour of that room, and the tattered mistress in the bed.

His was an unmistakable Celtic face, spherical, rosy, with a pirouette at the corner of the long lip and small blue eyes full of twinkle.

Helga remembered him very well from her childhood visit, when he had been as fond of a goat as anybody. She now exchanged twinkles with him as he addressed her:

"You've grown to be a grand armful since you was here before, a miserable spraddling wisp compared. It seems only yesterday, and here you are the full of a church door! Well, well! . . . But you'd look even better if you was out of that and gave your hair a lick and your sweet face a good honest wash. Mrs.

Johnson has been after remarking, what shall we be coming to with a slug-a-bed mistress and the whole shebang turned into a hit or miss. She's a great stickler for perfect system and distress, is the good woman."

"Mrs. Johnson takes rather dark views of things, doesn't she, Michael?"

"Well, she isn't much of a tease-me-sweet. Not what you'd call the life of the wake."

"Is the poor dear always down in the mouth?"

"She's a consistent woman, Miss."

"Do you think you ought to go on calling me Miss?" Helga inquired. "I'm quite married, you know."

"Well, you don't look it, Miss. You carry it off very well. Which shows what a fine constitution you have, by the grace of God."

"This was my uncle's room, wasn't it?" she said, gazing about her.

He agreed.

"I knew it was, because he hasn't entirely gone."

"Oh, don't say that, Miss," said Michael gravely. "He's thoroughly gone, God be praised, and a great loss it is! . . . Your uncle was entirely too much the gentleman to go haunting anybody, much less a young woman he was especially fond of and wanting to see as comfortable as possible. . . . There wasn't a poke of fun within a mile of that good tiresome-hearted man, but he was never one to put anybody out, being as kind a soul as ever lived, though not a cheerful spectacle."

"He was an unhappy man?"

"He was a fine steady low-spirited gentleman. . . . He'd sit and weep by the hour, and then go to Boston as lively as a cricket with Mr. Crawford to make money for a certain lady, to buy her a walled town, he said. . . . And it was *mortal*, for he let out she had a husband. So he had the morality not to go to see her. She lived far off, and he hated like poison to travel, and couldn't get up the energy to stir his stumps except in the way of business. . . . So the lady died. That was soon after I took him up, being a recent widow man, and not having anything pleasant to do and a broken heart inside me. Twenty-five years ago come Michaelmas. . . . And then the way he went on showed the regular easy low-spirits he'd treated us to before was only a lick and a promise to what he *could* do. . . . Swear and weep! Why, Miss, I've had him on my shoulder till you couldn't tell me from a bog . . . with night coming on and Jack-o'-lanterns."

"Did he ever mention the lady's name?"

"Did he mention! He'd say it by the hour, and curse till he was blue in the face! . . . It was a queer kind of a Dutch name, 'Dagmar.' "

"That was my mother's name," said Helga.

Michael was arrested.

"No, no," he burst out in honest distress. "Don't think for a minute it could have been the same lady—though being two of them with a name like that in the world passes the comprehension of man, meaning no disrespect to your sainted mother, God rest her soul! . . . Mr. Tredegar was too moral entirely to cheer up the devil by being in love with his own brother's wife. . . . He was a high-minded, respectable, God-fearing man and tidy in his habits as I could make him, and a devil of a time I had with it—him being the most slipshod, mawthering, slack-breeched, slop-fingered old cock you'd see in a month of Sundays! . . . But as for his haunting you, my darling, don't you give it a thought. Mr. Tredegar was too much of an elegant gentleman to be leaving a dirty ghost behind, messing about the place to the annoyance of everybody. . . . Besides it being a matter of taste and gentility, he wouldn't have the nerve, for Mrs. Johnson. She'd have him by the scruff for it in two frisks of the devil's tail. He'd know she'd take anything in the way of a ghost as untidy and clean him out like a cockroach. . . . I'm glad to observe you have the heart for a good laugh, Miss, showing you aren't in anywise of a haunted disposition."

"Oh, I'm haunted, I'm haunted. I hobnob with ghosts. . . . Tell me, Michael, you think my uncle was fond of me?" She lifted herself on her elbow and regarded him carefully. "Did he ever tell you—anything—for me?"

"He told me to keep an eye on you."

"Yes?"

"And he said, if your husband ever came here, I was to watch him like a rat."

The lady in the bed gave a slight start.

"And bash his brains out if he lifted a finger to do you a harm. . . . Not meaning him any disrespect, of course, and he as fine a gentleman as ever broke the roots of a woman's heart, and learned as Latin by all accounts, though no acquaintance of mine, heaven be praised; not that it wouldn't be a pleasure to meet any husband of yours, Miss, God help him. . . . However, Mr. Tredegar said he'd no more poke his dirty face in here than into the biggest kettle of hell, so I hope he'll be having a pleasant time wherever he is—and stay there. . . ."

Michael paused, for it was borne in upon him that he had lost his listener.

His lady was sitting up in her bed and leaning on her knees, occupied in obscure consideration. He ceased to speak, and approved her hair, which flooded down her back and lay in various undulating forms upon the linen behind her. He thought of a song which said that Mary's hair was like a cloak, and golden as the grain. And then he felt that this cloak was rather too dark for the simile. It was more the colour of a fawn, or of wild dark honey, streaming from the comb. Her hair at this moment looked strangely gay in contrast with her brooding face.

He was impelled to break that shadowy spell. In all probability it had not altogether pleased her, that item about watching her husband like a rat, or bashing out his brains.

"You mustn't think, Miss, that your uncle meant anything special. I mean about your husband. . . . Though when he told me, at the last, that his youngest brother Owen, like the black-hearted spalpeen he was, had married you, his own niece, years before, and you too young to know better at the time, he frothed at the mouth. . . . But very likely what he said didn't mean anything more than that, in the general way of husbands, it's just as well to be ready. . . . Have something handy, you know."

"So you think he didn't mean anything special when he suggested the bashing out of my husband's brains?"

Michael was curiously affected by this, uttered as it was in a tone of intense but dispassionate speculation.

"Not at all, my darling, not at all," he exclaimed. "It was just thrown out offhand, as you would pass the time of day," he reassured her, as soothing as a pigeon.

"And to think your old playmate Mike that gave you the team of goats never knew what had become of either of his little colleens all these years! . . . The old curmudgeon would fly into a blithering rage whenever I'd ask him a natural question. . . . And only on his last day did he have the decency to tell me you was coming to be the mistress. . . . And him foaming and yelling like a screech-owl that you had been married to his brother Owen for fifteen years, and your little sister, Eleanor, taking the veil in Ireland to do penance because you was your own uncle's wife, and you and him in a state of mortal sin . . . she that was so handy with the goats. . . . And the old man telling me it all, getting ready to die as he was, and fit to burst . . . and the heart of me in tatters at his news! . . . I didn't even know your father was dead, you poor, pined, unsoothered lamb!"

"Was that all my uncle told you?"

Michael stared a moment at the eyes that penetrated him from between their narrowed lids. There had been moisture in his own. It dried under that hard penetration.

"Well, Miss, he was after telling me a lot of things to do for your comfort when you came. . . . And not to let Mrs. Johnson molest your spirits, seeing as how you'd be needing all the gaying-up the place could afford after you got away from that filthy blackguard."

"Was that all?"

"And to get you on good terms with the pussies . . . he thinking of everything and growling like an old mangy dog."

"But my uncle wasn't very old, Michael," said the lady, relaxing her scrutiny, as if the man's evident candour had relieved her of some suspicion.

"Not in years, Miss, but he was a fine diligent hurrying man; and if he'd cared to boast and brag he could easy say no man could beat him at getting old. By the same token, setting natural pride aside, I could say there's not a man alive that ever beat him dying."

"But come now, Michael, didn't he leave me some special message? I've looked everywhere for a letter . . . I can't find a paper in the house."

"Sure he burned everything written or wrote him in the world before he died," said Michael, "but he did tell me one thing special for you, and that's the truth. He was sick as an old horse, and I mopping a bowl of broth off his nightgown—for he got to be a great hand for slopping toward the last, and it was out of one shirt and into another all the holy day—and he, the poor shamble-jambed old scarecrow sopping and shivering, and his beard full of boiled milk and tears."

"And what did he say?"

"The voice of him was no more than the rusty squeak of an old hinge . . . and he choking like a codfish between words, with his eyes bugged out like a pair of pickled onions, God rest his soul. . . ."

"And he said?"

"He said, 'Tell her it don't matter how we die.' "

"It doesn't matter how we die?" she repeated, below her breath, and with a singular look in her eyes, narrowed to a slit.

"He was very particular about it. He said it over three times. 'Michael,' says he, 'don't forget to tell her that it don't matter how we die.' "

There was no rejoinder of any kind from the mistress.

He was a little anxious over what he saw in his lady's face.

"There, now, don't you be taking to heart what any doddering old dead fool might be blubbering on his deathbed," he soothed like a pigeon. "Lay you down, my darling, and take a brisk little nap in the bright morning for your beauty's sake. . . . Husheen, hushoo."

CHAPTER XVI HELGA WRITES TO A HUSBAND AND A NUN

Mrs. Tredegar was writing a letter.

Michael had brought her breakfast to her bed. Evidently she had not moved a finger after he had withdrawn. He had waited a little while before that discreet withdrawal, but as she did not speak he had gone down, delivered himself of his apron, mop, bucket, and the character of scrub-man, returning with a generous trayful in the character of valet.

She made no sign of noticing his presence at first, but after a little she let him prop her with pillows and pour her coffee. He said nothing more about her getting up to see the works of God in the morning or to take a nap for her beauty's sake, but left her to eat in silence.

When he came back for the depleted tray he was pleased to see that Little David had returned from his breakfast below stairs and was ensconced beside her knees. Blinko could be seen cracking jokes with a butterfly in the garden, hurling the golden jest of his person into the sunshine. Mrs. Tredegar had asked for writing materials and was now alone, engaged with a letter on her knees.

> I hasten to let you know that Llewelyn's last word was, "It doesn't matter how we die." He left it especially for us, Owen,

> so make whatever you can of it. *Ask the dead lamb* in his no-grave. Of course, we are as dead as any. Does it matter how we died? . . . Oh, my husband, my brother! Where is my brother? . . . "It does not matter how we die." You are wrong not to let me know where you are, my father. (If the hyena has devoured my father, is the hyena not my father?)
>
> The young fiends are filial hearted. It does not matter how we die. Unless the journeys of my filial heart have their old certain death's-head for a bull's-eye, they fall back aimless. . . . But it does not matter how we die. The arch-fiend's orphan, Lucifer's widow in red weeds, is ill at ease with cherubs. . . . Where are you? Oh, I am your orphan. But it does not matter how I die. I faint for infernal tidings. I peak, I pine for homely pestilence. The wound, the wound . . . you always had Attic salt to put in the wound. Where are you? Are you living? . . . But it does not matter how you die.
>
> Charles Crawford will send this, but he obeys you. He will not let me know where you are. I am between his horns. Why have you thrust me off? Why have you kicked me out? But it does not matter how I die. . . . No good will come of it. I shall only be looking another death in his hollow eyeholes. You cannot save me by this means. These people will not let me in. But it does not matter how I die.

Mrs. Tredegar finished this letter, but after stroking Little David respectfully, she added a postscript:

> I now see that one of the worst things about going hell-for-leather about the world is the deprivation of cats. Llewelyn has furnished me with these necessaries.

Presently she added a second postscript:

> My heart turns to milk when I think of Llewelyn dying alone here. Now I know that you confided to him the secret about the death of the lamb. Though you told me we were carrying it alone. I must think of him a great deal to learn this man who loved my mother and who, knowing what he did, refrained from bashing out your brains, and instead gives us at the last—the husheen, hushoo . . . dying like a dog, but thinking of our aching Cain marks, and saying of the dead lamb, saying it . . . saying it for our sakes that it *does not matter* how he died. . . . Nursing us assassins to the bitter last . . . howling and nursing . . . husheen, hushoo.

Mrs. Tredegar placed these strange sheets in an envelope and went out to bathe in the river. There was a cove, upstream from the house, beyond the great rock which projected like an Ethiopian head brooding with its lips in the water. It was here, too, the brook came cascading down from the hillside fields, melting into the river with a waterfall to splash merrily down the body of a bather.

She was starting down the path toward this place when one of her immobile moments of reverie took her. She came to a stand, bearing soap, sponge, towel on arm, Chinese garment gently flapping, face to the river, when the Reverend George appeared and came also to a stand. Ever since their last meeting, the Reverend George had felt that he must see Mrs. Tredegar again.

He did not wish to recall the narrative of the Norwegian bishop who wrote poems on all fours when he was drunk. But he very much wanted to tell her what the story of the little French curé had done for his heart. He felt he owed it to her to tell her. And he felt it his duty to warn her to be careful not to repeat the "*ce n'est pas vrai*" to persons who would not be able to take the spirit of the thing without having their faith impaired in the letter. "It is not true about hell" was a dangerous assertion to lay before the untutored. His heart had been relieved indeed by the tale of the relenting of the old curé, but it was not everyone who was in a spiritual state to have his heart relieved with impunity.

When he descended the road to The River House, he paused a moment to contemplate her back, as she stood on the bank, looking into the river. He felt it was not an easy back to approach with an admonition, or to render thanks to for a relieved heart, or indeed to address at all.

"Good-morning, Father," she said when he spoke to her, and this time he did not bother to correct her about the title, for he was struck by the impression that she looked very strange. Her eyes were narrowed until they hardly seemed to be open at all. Perhaps they had been dazzled by the steely sheet of the river in the full morning light.

"How are you off for signs and wonders?" she asked.

The Reverend George tried to collect himself. He did feel from his heart that there had been a touch of that sort of thing in the effect made upon him by the story of the little curé. And he wished to express his gratitude, but here again he was troubled by that besetting difficulty with the word.

"Well," said she, "have you anything new to offer on that old affair of fraternal murder?"

He stared at her mutely.

"I mean, as a priest, is it your opinion that it matters how we die?"

She waited, but as he seemed incapable of response, she went on and disappeared into the cove.

Later, Michael, peeping into her room, found her writing another letter. The people of the town would have been hard put to it to make head or tail of either.

> *Ad majorem dei gloriam.*[1] *Veni elécta mea.*[2] . . . Eleanor, lean over your convent wall. Virgin most renowned. . . . *Virgo prudentissima, virgo veneránda, virgo praedicánda.*[3] . . . I comfort myself speaking to you in the rubied vocabulary of the Church. . . . But I have no words of occult power to describe to you, my sister, my Dove, what is the joy of my dear husband over this pastoral conclusion of his wanderings. Llewelyn's home has received him.
>
> "*O Beata solitudo!*
> *O Sola beatitudo!*[4]
>
> Imagine gaunt Ishmael sitting at evening by his hearth. He has the great cote of pigeons we liked so as children, and feeds them by the hour, delighting in the sweet of their talk, their coo, coo, cool, cool, roucouling cool . . .
>
> Meanwhile the soul of the nursing saint, Llewelyn, makes our

---

[1] To the greater glory of God. (Phrase much used by Roman Catholics.)

[2] Come, my chosen.

[3] Virgin most prudent, virgin most venerable, virgin most renowned. (From the Litany of the Blessed Virgin.)

[4] O beatific solitude!
O sole beatitude!

cradle. All infants repose in such a cradle. One of these receptacles is named Rosemary.

As I have told you, for years Owen and I have not lived upon those conjugal terms which so distressed you for our souls. What can we do against a furious dove? Repent, repent: Husheen, hushoo. So I trust you will at last give over those tiresome penances which must long since have become a damnable bore. We live innocent, like two little saints on a twig. . . . We are fabulous as saints and salamanders. . . . The branded saint refuses the poppy and the grape, hiding his own anodyne in his sleeve. . . . We have a river and trees. These conspire with saints. . . . Llewelyn has dowered us with all necessary conspiracies, including cats.

When the saint Llewelyn had suffered the last extremity, he was told that to be safe from memory he might be turned into a stone or a tree, as he preferred. "Then let me be a tree," said he, "so that I may still be a shelter . . . and nests be built in my unremembering palms."

The dead passion of saints makes harmless sanctuary.

You will observe I have been thinking quite a bit about holy salamanders of late. This is one of the Sabbath diversions of the foul fiend.

The good saint, however, slips through our fingers like water . . . but he bears our ships to the most distant ports . . . so Llewelyn. It is easier to catch a thief than a saint. . . . Llewelyn eludes our question.

An old saint resembles a young sinner by his phosphorescence. . . . It is difficult to tell one drunken man from another by his walk, and hard to tell a saint from a poet by his genuflection. Sainthood is philosophy set to music. . . . Llewelyn howled.

No saintship can be acquired for another's sake, only for its own, like all goodly crafts.

The soul of a saint has the stomach of ostriches; it digests nails, scourges, and gibbets, while the saint at his ease converses with birds or makes jokes with his brother, the wind.

A saint is a magician and a cheat. When they stretch him on the rack, by tricks he turns it into the bosom of his friend.

The saint has found the philosopher's stone, but it is a meteorite, still flaming.

Not all saints have been whipped easily into the ring, those tawny boys. They were made to roar I tell you, before they would jump through the hoop, or have flowers braided in the mane.

I have chatted this much about these charming creatures because they are in your line. But it is carrying copes to Canterbury, or bells to Bedlam.

I shall think of Llewelyn night and day. But as for saints in general, I am finished with the subject, and for some time I hope I'll have nothing more to say about the dirty fellows.

You can attend to them, O sweet *spáculum justitiæ*,[1] rejoicing in your beautiful careless sainthood. . . . As for me, give me something to be careless about and I'll be careless enough.

I have had, however, an adventure with a bird, not a very sleek one, rather frowsy, perhaps a phœbe. Three days ago I was walking in the wood when he came on my shoulder. He rode home upon me, with brief descents for insects or worms which he bore aloft and, I rather regret to say, munched on my shoulder. Perhaps Llewelyn had tamed and preached to him. . . . Each morning he has returned to breakfast with me, sitting in my hand or on my head. A living bird should always be worn as a head ornament. He is very jaunty, an urchin, perhaps a scalawag. . . . He has come again. Pussies, lie down! . . .

In the town itself, however, there is a paucity of wonder.

If the worst came to the worst, I would rather trust a saint than a citizen. . . . I myself do Christian deeds with a pagan intention.

You ask what is the condition of my husband's health. This quiet existence is a benefit, though there is something false in the cave of his breast. The heart is a brute, and it must die like a brute. . . . But an old cock has just told us it doesn't matter how we die. . . . That old familiar stifling off. If Owen leaves me, however, I shall have no more tenure than a cobweb. All harbours are a fast after the arch fiend's hospitality. But you need not go on praying against his anger as you used when you were tiny and he damned a doorknob.

If you could know how slightly he needs the honeyed superfluity of those prayers, straining up to God like an absent-minded cherub still petitioning for Babylon. . . . Far from *à la page*. If you could see him by his hearth. . . . The mildest mannered man that ever scragged a brawd. Brawd means "brother," doesn't it? More mouth-filling. (Whole phrase mere rant. Take no notice.) Now at last you can pray a bit just for the fun of it. No fiendliness to pray about ever any more, O my saint! We no longer marry our uncles, for henceforth I shall have nothing to do with the tender passion. It is a Corinthian city, laborious to build, and it takes too long for the Athenians, Carthaginians, Romans, and Saracens to raze it to the ground.

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[1] O sweet Mirror of Justice.

However, I shall always be very much interested in what you have to say of Divine Love. And I hope you will never hesitate to mention the matter when you write—in your voice of doves.

In all probability it was thus the Holy Ghost cooed to Mary. This birdlike speech is fitting for feathered conversations. Without doubt the younger cherubs chirp, and unwithering archangels have the furious flute of nightingales.

At dawn, a certain thrush here gave tongue as if he had been waiting all night awake for that moment of violin.

In all probability the Infant Jesus, lying in her lap, spoke to his mother like that before he learned to talk, the divine twitter, the bird babble . . . the beak. The *esprit* of a parakeet, though, is not adapted to angelic communications. He is a scapegrace.

There are no nightingales here. An unexpected nightingale would be as perfect as catastrophe. Does the cloister continue to agree with your health? Nuns are white-cheeked as elf-wives, but I have known them to be stout customers. There was a pair of legs belonging to a lay sister in the Sacré Cœur. I used to see them when she was scrubbing stairs. Gusto! The short white stockings girded below the knee . . . thick wool petticoats bluffing out behind, sweet face drooping, praying over the sweet toil. In my innocence I used to wonder how such legs could burgeon there, in the constricted place, magnifying the Lord like a pair of oaks.

There are free heathen legs in this town no wilder. I hope yours are holding out. Genuflection plays the devil with the knees, I'm afraid. . . .

By the way, there is a man here. I swear he is the bantling of a god. He has his father's nose. Give him the name Assisi gave the wind and put him in your prayers.

I was hanged when I began to write to you, sweet mistress. Your invisible consecrated hands have cut the noose.

By the rocking, I know the human race is still safe in its earthy cradle. I am your heart's own until the cradle is blown to flinders and the rude babe flies out to banter infinity. . . . Oh, Raphael, how you bind and comfort me. Oh, Raphael! *Angelus Dómini Ráphael apprehéndit et ligávit dæmónem.*[1]

Michael remembers that you were handy with the goats. . . .

I have made Llewelyn's grave gay. Our father's is far from here, but gay because he *died in peace;* our mother's because it is beside a great playful city.

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[1] Raphael, Angel of the Lord, overcame and bound the demon.

CHAPTER XVII THE TOWN, OLD GENTLEMEN, LOVE AND A CAMERA

No use to feign a name for the town. All its inhabitants called it simply The Town. If they met in Mexico, Paris, London, or Shanghai, they would say, "When are you going back to Town?" But young people that found the means to stay away did not come back.

It was a town of old people. Just enough of the able-bodied remained to take care of them. Old ladies sat on every hearth, and old gentlemen popped out of closets to see what was going on. On neutral ground between these and the children, the parents stood, alert for perpetual manœuvring and defense.

The old ones lived obscure lives, puttering about secret occupations, or well to the fore, were apparent in prominent spots fixing habitually censorious or suddenly shocked eyes upon all and sundry. They disapproved liberally.

At their emergence, the younger inhabitants became furtive, spoke lower, or in high cheerful tones plunged into other topics.

The children evaded the curious eyes of grandfathers looking out above beards like watchful birds from nests. They were more active at once when these experimented with death, taking frequent flights into that little home-made death that we call sleep.

The ladies were dedicated to the care of houses. In the midst of conversations, they thought of domestic vicissitudes or planned the purchase of objects that would complete the equipment of the house, their husbands, themselves or their children. They mentioned their preoccupations to each other a good deal, and this prevented their intercourse from drifting into vain philosophies and abstractions. They said wise things, however, on the conduct of affairs from the cradle to the altar (hence to the ensuing cradle) and the grave.

When they met at the close of the day in the full daintiness of their evening apparel, it would have been difficult (without their full recitals) to imagine them involved in the toil and moil of what had passed in their houses during the previous hours.

There they were, the reposeless warriors against wear and tear, illness, dust, and indecency. They were never quite forgetful of the ceaseless processes of soiling and cleansing.

Families that had owned their lands and houses two hundred years or so before still owned them. There was very little poverty in the town, but bountiful Nature had always provided a few humbler families for the production of servitors. And lately these ranks had been augmented by Polish, Italians, and Czecho-Slovakians more properly designed for servitude. They had taken up the tilling of fields, an occupation no longer in favour with the legitimate inhabitants. From among these, too, had emerged the Singing Milkman, who was generally thought to be a little touched in the head. He went about at evening with his pails instead of in the morning, which is perhaps the usual bent of milkmen. Until quite late at night he could be heard across the dark gardens and fields singing strange songs.

The ponderous Charles Crawford had been a disturbing energy in the town. He had brought about the placing of electric street-lamps. The town which before had gone visiting with lanterns had been much put out. But he had ruthlessly pressed on with sewers. The town was then in real distress. Up till then there had been no Italians. But these had come to dig, and they lifted up from the trenches they dug their eyes like great black moons, which shed bewildered moonlight on the hurrying ladies. One lady had nearly swooned at finding one of these moony terrors in her orchard, holding out to her his dark hand. There had been a nickel in the hand and he had come to buy an apple, so it did not turn out so badly. But she told of the shock a long time. There was an older part of the cemetery that Charles would have liked to spruce up a bit. The ancient stones were lost in thick undergrowth, and trees were growing through the middle of graves, so every one did seem to tell a name.

But Giulia had begged that the place be let alone. Hidden in the long grass there were rudimentary flowers painted on some of the gravestones, the little wild-rose form which stands for a flower with children. These Rosemary had painted there in her childhood, bringing out her little tin kit, because the stones seemed lonely without flowers.

But Charles, the desperado, knew no bounds. He had the single street paved and spoiled the Duck Pond. It had a stone rim now, and a dolphin in the middle. It was still called the "Duck Pond" though it had no ducks, but three ponderous stone benches round it with a flowering bush behind each.

Charles had a few desperadoes on his side, but except for these the town had resisted every one of these contaminations.

The grass and dandelions which had made a border for the sidewalks were obliterated by the pavement, but the ancient elms were left to mingle their viny locks, roofing the way with Gothic arches.

Several thoroughfares led out from the town, embowered roads that sauntered past old houses, gardens, fields, then taking to their heels made short work of disappearing among the hills.

Some of the lilac hedges were taller than two men on end.

There was the church of the Reverend George, polite but not too High, another church rather Low, and the humble chapel for Roman Catholics. That had come of late and could not yet afford a proper chime. The Italian priest, plump and angelic, came out on the porch and rang a dinner bell for mass. The two other churches tolled handsomely.

The Reverend George yearned toward the apparent simplicity of Father Angelo's ministration.

He envied him the shortness of his sermons (the scanty congregation emerged so gaily and soon from Mass) and he deeply envied him the poverty of his flock, and the fraternal freedom with which he transported utensils and provisions to their humble abodes, consorting with his parishioners, and when they were hard pressed even lending a hand in their fields.

Once he had met Father Angelo at night in a lonely path between upland farms. He was not highly recognizable at first, as he was on his way to a sick woman with the Eucharist, his identity much obscured by a mattress which he was carrying on his back.

The Reverend George joyfully offered to help with the burden, and they jogged on in sweet companionship under the spreading mattress like two benign turtles under a single shell.

"Busy as you are, can you contrive time for prayer?" inquired the assisting clergyman, never before having enjoyed a conversation with an ordained papist.

"*Sempre*. All time," rejoined the other in a business-like manner. "Just now I prayed. . . . He is the North, the Magnet. The metal soul turn without knowing. Without conscious . . . It is Art."

The Reverend George felt sublimity, but he agitated the mattress by stumbling against his companion and was rather startled when Father Angelo hallooed out:

"*Piano, piano!* Easy there! I've got our Blessed Lord in my pocket."

Charles had wished to have the railway station brought nearer the town, but here the town stood firm. It remained several miles away beyond hills enough, so there was only the faintest sound of engines reaching across on humid days. There was no mill or factory to defile the purity of the air. The Windsors' woollen mill was several miles down the river, among other abominations of the sort.

Old gentlemen sat on the benches by the Duck Pond in the sun. Some herded grandchildren with fierce or absent-minded eyes, according to the way in which Nature had disposed them.

Old Mr. Brewster sat among them a good deal, for from here he could get a better view of Rosemary's house than from his nephew's veranda. He had no grandchildren, and he had never had traffic of the heart with any child or woman but Rosemary. He was a strange, shy old man. He usually kept a little camera beside him, disturbing other old gentlemen with the legs of its tripod.

But these old gentlemen, or their grandchildren, would always tell him when Rosemary appeared, for it was well known how important it was to him to get as many glimpses as he could. He, in his turn, would do the good service for Jackie, telling him whenever he saw him if there was any likelihood of Rosemary's being about.

Every now and then he would go shyly to take a photograph of Rosemary. Hanging the baby's blanket to get reflected light, with a tea tray to aid, he would prepare for the achievement with long preparations. The Old Baby's high chair sometimes made a better support than the tripod, an encyclopædia superimposed. The back of him was very touching when he was under the black cloth taking sights. The seat of his trousers had a sort of hammock that was hard for Rosemary to bear. His movements had lost the coördination of proper nerves and muscles. His hands trembled and dropped things. To circumvent this inexpertness he executed everything in a hurry. With insecure hurried movements he adjusted and readjusted his apparatus, screwing on and screwing off, taking in and out the resisting plates, stopping to wipe his blurred blue eyes in which the tears were always gathering.

Then he would forget to operate the bulbs, looking at the sweet patient face with its reedy eyelashes, waiting there before him, trying not to blink.

And, at the last, when the bulb had really acted under a frenzied pressure, there would have to be another plate put in. All would have to be done over again with the pains of Sisyphus, while his quivering voice explained without reproach, "You laughed just at the wrong moment, you dear, dear thing!"

CHAPTER XVIII TWO LADIES ARE TERRIFIED BY A NURSERY

When Helga first saw Rosemary she said, "This is one of your porcelain women."

Her entire person was contrived with great delicacy, with finesse. Every detail was carried out as if by a master jeweller: and the workmanship was so refined that it seemed desperately unfitted to resist marauders.

There was a lovely pathos in the slender stem of her neck, bending over a baby, that might have brought tears to a highly sensitive onlooker.

The texture of her twilight skin was fine as gauze. The backs of her hands had the colour of ivory and the feel of silk. The palms and pointed finger tips were horny.

Later, when Helga saw the multitudinous feats of strength she performed, the household labour, the sleepless service of children, she was amazed.

"When do you really sleep?" she asked, looking at Rosemary's bed surrounded with cribs.

"After she has had the first kitten," returned the other laughing. "Tabby never really sleeps again. . . . Have you looked at the face of a lioness?"

It was then that Helga looked at the porcelain face of Rosemary and said:

"Sinews of Satan in Sèvres."

Rosemary would listen attentively to anyone or ones who happened to be talking, from the oldest grandpas to the Littlest Johnnies, smiling and nodding in perpetual acquiescence.

Meanwhile her subtle eyes amid their dark plentiful lashes would present a slightly smoky surface, as if a thin veil had been drawn over whatever mental exploits were going on behind them. Her replies were charming, though sometimes a little beside the mark.

But, in the main she did very well and watched out for pitfalls. She had the sedative voice fitted for persuading children that all is well.

She contrived to get through a good many books while a baby occupied what she called her "nook," meaning the tender hollow between her throat and knees.

When a toddler wanted to get into his nook, he brought her any volume he could lay hands on. As he reached or climbed for a book, it meant "nook," and, leaving whatever she might be doing, Rosemary would sit down in her rocking chair as patient as a cow in a field, bullied by her calf.

As she read, she kept up a dim nodding and smiling to show the other children besetting her that she was still at their disposal.

Her adorable mouth did not open in smiling, only the corners extended, trembling enigmatically into her delicate colourless cheeks. When she laughed, however, she disclosed her gay teeth and tongue very heartily while she emitted an uproarious cockadoodledoo. The children would show approbation of this and say, "Mother is crowing."

"Havoc! The innocents are completely ruthless, aren't they!" remarked Mrs. Tredegar, visiting Rosemary, thoroughly beset by her young and surrounded by cribs. "If I ever thought of them at all hitherto, I imagined that they had a rudimentary humanity."

"Oh, they have," returned the hostess with her cheek on the feathery head of the baby she was holding. "Occasionally they relent."

"I relent," put in Matthew, the oldest boy, leaving his toy phonograph and laying his arm over his mother's shoulders.

"I relent too," chirped Maidie, not looking up from the dressing of a doll that squeaked.

"So do I," murmured Mark (called the Infant Samuel), from his velocipede.

"Me don't, me don't, me don't!" chanted the Littlest Johnny (or Old Baby) and went round and round, dragging a little wagon full of pebbles.

A row of newly washed diapers, or "didies," hung on the foot of the smallest crib and on the tattered Japanese screen that partly enclosed it. From time to time Rosemary gently drew her head with its dark wreathy hair away from the most immediate "didy" that depended above her.

But she was so accustomed to being uncomfortable that it did not occur to her to move her chair. Besides, it is difficult to move one's chair without disturbing the comfortably disposed baby in the lap.

Matthew (aged nine) having recorded that he relented, permitted himself the relaxation of winding up a screeching top. As he did so he uttered at the top of his lungs a bit from his father's latest sermon:

" 'And when he had opened the seventh seal, there was silence in heaven about the space of half an hour. Revelation.' "

This was possibly meant as admonition to the other youngsters to make less noise.

Maidie had left her doll upside down and taken to a small engine drawn by a string.

The Infant Samuel, a little creature of five years, porcelain like his mother, propelled a squealing velocipede.

These three younger ones now circled the room at a lively gait, the Old Baby bringing up the rear.

But Maidie, being nearly eight, and an Amazon, now went faster and faster, doubling the speed of the two little brothers, and bowled over the velocipede with rider and the Littlest Johnny, wagon, pebbles, and all.

Twenty minutes later the consequent uproar was finished. The nursing baby was laid on the bed in the next room to recover his equilibrium, lately disturbed by pangs of sympathy.

Rosemary sat, still trembling, the massacred ones in her nook as tight as two baby birds in a nest.

The Littlest Johnny was "getting soft" against her, and the long sobs of the Infant Samuel were subsiding, while meditative tears still fell at intervals down his translucent cheeks.

Now and then from her breast his dark wet eyes turned entreatingly between reedy lashes toward where Maidie, the devastator, was repenting in a corner. He was afraid her repentance might estrange her from him.

Five minutes later he resumed his steed to show her that his wounds were not mortal and she might cease repenting. She was his hero.

Presently, Maidie, aware of all this going on in the soul of her ardent squire, took up the string of his little engine and followed him with conspicuous discretion. Then the Littlest Johnny (or Old Baby) jumped down from the nook and joined the procession with shoutings.

Matthew kept an eye on the Amazon, for a moment, glancing furtively at his mother to see how she was weathering it all. Then there was a small sigh in the next room as if a mouse had sighed, and he went in there, got on the bed, and lay down beside the baby, soothing its memories of disaster with whispers. What he said was just audible, " 'Wherefore, when we could no longer forbear, we thought it good to be left in Athens alone. Thessalone, Thessalone, Thessalonians.' "

"How do you thank the government?" asked the Infant Samuel, not diminishing his speed.

"What on earth do you want to thank the government for?" asked Maidie.

"For roads and policemen and dogs and letting criminals escape."

"Do you think we ought to thank the government for letting criminals escape, as well as for dogs, Mrs. Tredegar?" said Rosemary, laughing.

The visitor seemed to reflect on the matter some time. Presently she said, "I suppose you have been at considerable pains to get these children . . . and you have secrets."

The corners of Rosemary's mouth trembled into their enigmatical smile. Her eyes took on their smoky look. Agonizing and unseemly images thrust themselves into her brain. Her head swam a little when she remembered these things. "What a predicament!" her soul would say, thrusting them back as a diver, mounting, thrusts back the suffocating weight of the fathoms.

"I'll eat my hat if these children haven't been hard come by!" Helga pursued, full of apparently new apprehensions.

"You may call it hard and not be far off," said the other. "You can call it any name you care to call death by, if you like."

Helga had an expression of horror-in-innocence. Rosemary took the baby back again from the arms of Matthew, who had had enough of him. She thought of her guest, "She doesn't know anything—anything. She has gone scot-free."

She was making certain changes in the baby's apparel. It lay bowled over on her rubber apron, its woollen prehensile feet trying to clasp her chin, while its head, sparsely covered with fine yellow curling tendrils, hung down her thigh.

Though it was often in a position to view the ceiling, like reclining tourists looking up in the Sistine chapel, the expanse above always filled it with Balboan exaltation. It reached its tiny hands upward in rhythmical convulsions of rapture, no more conscious of what Rosemary was doing to it than a bud momentarily tipped over by a breeze.

"The bearing must seem a strange vegetable sort of state for a sentient being," remarked Mrs. Tredegar, viewing the overthrown baby with widened eyes. "Wouldn't it have been better if women weren't sentient?"

"It would be a lot more comfortable. Sometimes a brain tied on seems excess baggage."

"Does that sort of thing affect the longevity of women?"

"They batten on it," laughed Rosemary, with three safety pins in her mouth. "Look at the grandmothers."

"Muncho, muncho!" roared the Old Baby.

When the guest was informed that this referred to the act of munching, and that the Old Baby was scarcely ever free from that idea, she asked:

"Shall I rustle some grub from the galley?"

It took Rosemary a moment or two to take this in; then she said that a hiatus now and then in the youngster's favourite activity was not inadvisable. Whereupon the Old Baby reached up on tiptoes for a cup of milk on a table and precipitated cup and contents on his head.

The Infant Samuel shouted from his velocipede, "I'm a bat, I'm a bat! I'm a battering ram!" and began battering and ramming various objects, including his mother's shins.

"A child is an avalanche of dismay," remarked Mrs. Tredegar, amazed.

"It verges on the idiotic to hurt your own useful mother," said Rosemary, bending round the baby in her lap to rub the place. The baby became a mass of struggling arms and legs. It uttered gurgling protests.

"Oh, my poor mother!" cried the Infant Samuel, turning quite pale, his gigantic entreating eyes full of tears. "My useful mother—the genuine article."

"Why does he say 'the genuine article?' " inquired the visitor.

"Why do you say the things *you* say?" asked Maidie, defending her squire.

"Hearsay," said Mrs. Tredegar.

"In a manner of speaking," said Matthew, attaching a string to the doorknob for no immediately apparent reason. "The gift of tongues."

The Infant Samuel sat his steed like a ruined king upon a lost battlefield. He gazed at his mother with wet eyes, revolving in his mind the phenomenon that this glorious and towering creature was subject to pain when rammed.

He was subject to moments of sorrowful rapture, when he looked like a seraph exiled from paradise.

He suffered at being bathed and undressed, exhibiting an inexplicable delicacy. When Rosemary would say, "But you aren't a moonbeam. You're a visible person, and visible persons have to be washed," he would hide in her skirt and cry, "I don't want to be a visible person!"

She and the Reverend George had a ticklish time of it every morning, inducing him to submit to certain functions in the bathroom. The child would be livid and trembling with repugnance.

"But you must do as all the good little animals do."

When they said this with that hearty false parental cheer, he wept out, "I will die all my life if I have to be an animal!"

"One two, one two, left, right, left, right," chanted Rosemary with parental cheer, hoping to relieve her guest of the hullabaloo. "Out into the garden, the whole kit and boodle!"

"Not without you!"

Apart from her, these children dropped into desolation. Without her, they would flag in a game and stare about as if suddenly discovering that they had been robbed. If she had been away from the house, she found them in tears. They rushed to her like blood to the heart.

When she was with them, they seemed to forget her in their play: they did not know what was filling them with the delight that made them shout out, leap and trample.

The Infant Samuel was on his knees, stroking his mother's bruises with tears on his long lashes. Now he got up and punished his velocipede.

"He has new teeth like a piano," Maidie was musing.

"Who?"

"Old Brewster. But he is too old to wear them, like short breeches."

"Better say old *Mr.* Brewster," said Rosemary, "and you might omit the 'old' if you have time."

" 'A kitten once to his mother said
I'll never more be good,
I'll go and be a robber fierce
And live in the dreary wood,
Wood, wood, wood,
And live in the dreary wood,' "

chanted the Infant Samuel from the linen book of *The Robber Kitten,* which had belonged to his grandmother's tender years.

"I'll steal, and steal, and pick pockets," he added, "but I will never ram my useful mother. The genuine article."

Matthew continued the strain, hitching a chair to the doorknob with innumerable knots of string so that Mrs. Tredegar would have trouble in getting out.

> " 'It climbed a tree to rob a nest
> Of young and tender owls
> But the branch bro-*koff* and the kitten fell
> With six tremendous howls,
> William Dean howls,
> With six tremendous howls.' "

Rosemary could hardly contain the love she felt for Mrs. Tredegar. She made no sign of it, but closed her eyes a moment with an expression of ineffable patience. Thus she made herself a receptacle for the love that old Mr. Brewster was projecting at that moment toward her. From her childhood she had taken these intervals of hospitality for this intense love. At the house of his nephew, where he lived, beyond the church, the old man was sitting in the porch, in his stockings, having removed his shoes after a toddle round the Duck Pond and past Rosemary's gate.

He was praying that she might not die in childbirth. He was an atheist, but when he thought of her, his soul burst with desperation into old religious phrases of entreaty.

The matter of love now took Rosemary's thoughts to the opposite hill. She had a slight convulsion at her heart and hastily opened her eyes. There were love and repugnance in her eyes . . . "Oh, the poor Mercutio!"

On the opposite hill in the study of Windsor, Jackie, whom she had called Mercutio in her youth, sprawled with his elbows on the window sill, overlooking the village. Between his elbows lay the works of Kit Marlow, open at "The Jew of Malta," and beside him was a hybrid potation that he had mixed himself.

He had seen Helga going into the parson's house, and he was trying to imagine just what she would be thinking of Rosemary's kiss.

"Kiss me, Cousin, kiss me too. . . . Of many thousand kisses the poor first . . . When are you going to take me there among your other children? . . . Aren't you ever ashamed to shut your vagrant child out in the road? What are you hiding from Helga under your insupportable eyelashes? Do you remember when I told you, you don't see with your eyes but feel with your eyelashes? You have a 'vesper face,' you Twilight. Do you remember when I came back from France you ran to me, shouting out, 'I can't believe my eyelashes!' . . . Then you told me you had married that son of a slant-faced sheep. The Reverend Jawge has a profile purely Greek, say the dames. . . . That cuts out any inopportune bulge of brain. . . ."

Jackie rose and mixed himself another hybrid potation. . . . "Come, my master . . . 'Oh Mistris! I have the bravest, gravest secret, subtil, bottle-nosed knave to my Master, that ever Gentleman had. . . . You said you loved him because he belonged to the pure of heart. . . . Let him leave my patter alone. . . . Let him keep his mild sheep-hoofs off my tough virtue, my ewe lamb. Purity's my trade. . . .

" 'What, leaving your job so early!' says Who-is-Sylvia-what-is-she, wishing she could dust me out and off for keeps. You know, who leaves his job gets back to the gate of heaven for a while . . . for a while . . . for a look . . . for a look!

" 'Oh my girle,
My gold, my fortune, my felicity:
Strength to my soule, death to mine enemy; . . .
Oh girle, oh gold, oh beauty, oh my blisse!'

"How pale . . . how pale: They've got you strapped. They've got you nailed. How many Calvaries does it take to make the nailed Titania say, 'It is consummated'?" (Here the soliloquy of Jackie becomes inconvenient to transcribe.)

Again he ministered to himself a brimming drink. . . . "Do you remember that little letter you wrote me last spring when in my madness I sent you a cartload of violets? Says you, 'I find it hard to believe my eyelashes as a general rule, but suddenly I did when I was confronted by your love and purple. Just to know that you are out there, still kicking, gives me a new lease . . . on my eyelashes, I mean. . . .' That letter . . . ' 'twas knavely done, and like a Knight at Armes.' "

Jackie paused in barging about the room, glass and cigarette in hand. He paused because he had spilled a puddle-full on the rug, and he let out a guffaw for the tidy Sylvia. He had stopped in front of a looking glass. He was not much of a hand for looking glasses. His admiration for his brother's phiz cut out any faint praise he might have given his own. It was a face of the same general cut, with the convex nose and the underlip in difficulty with the good long teeth. But it was less accurately defined, less finely pale. There was a trifle of thickness, a touch of murkiness over it. Across the iris of his blinded eye a milky glaze had begun to spread. A scar crossed it from the forehead, cleaving the cheek bone. The surviving eye, doing double duty, had a hard-working glare.

Above this heavily marked but youngish face the temples shot up rather far, as the hair had receded from them, and the hair was gray. It fell on his forehead in a thin "bang."

"You've powdered me, *ma belle*. . . . Rosemary et La Guerre, coiffeuses."

He wanted to go down into the road to meet Helga when she came away from the parson's house, so she might give him some plums about Rosemary. He examined himself and concluded not to do so. . . . "One decency—one damned undeniable decency in maculated mass of maledicted mollusc. . . . Keep off from pullets when pickled. . . ."

He returned to the window and sent his single shot of sight down the hillside to the village street, the church and the little house beside it under the Gothic arch of elms.

"Calling me Mercutio doesn't give me mercury, Coz. . . . It's wide as a church door. . . . Better get scarce in Windy's room. Bœtians toddle out of Athens! . . ."

If Jackie had returned to the window he would now have seen the gracious shape of Giulia descending from her hill and entering the parson's gate.

When she came up to the nursery, ushered by Mrs. Chick's daughter, Rosemary made one or two movements to order her hair and dress. She had not troubled herself with any such effort for the benefit of Mrs. Tredegar.

Giulia sat down beside her, discreetly out of the baby's reach. She never touched the children. Neither did Helga. The latter seemed vaguely frightened if one laid hands on her. Now, she stood before the two ladies examining their contrasted graces. She always exhibited the greatest satisfaction when she saw them side by side.

"You are singing together like the morning stars," she said. "The sleek blade and the ragged rose. . . . Your beauties are rhyming. . . . In the night I heard the ball beneath me careering in its unimpeded cloak of air, and I thought of you two, praying that these divine beings might not be in danger. I praised you in the night, telling over your attributes. I am here to magnify women."

The two ladies flushed, glancing momentarily at each other.

"It embarrasses you to be magnified," said Helga wonderingly. "Perhaps those who loved each other in shy childhood have always a sort of *mauvaise honte*. While I proclaim your beauty, you worship surreptitiously. There is a mouse hiding in your sweet eyes."

"We lap it up when we're alone with you," said Rosemary. "It's hearing it *together* that makes us mousy."

"You see we've always been highly respectful to each other. Haven't we?" said Giulia, turning her smile on Rosemary. "We wouldn't have thought it quite respectful to magnify, would we?"

"But haven't I *carte blanche*," inquired Mrs. Tredegar. "Do I have to live up to you?"

"No, no," reassured Rosemary cordially. "Magnify away. . . . We don't have to be pandered to."

Giulia never stayed long in the nursery, not half long enough for the children, who would pause in their fearful activities to admire her—but not too near. When she presently rose, resuming her ivory walking stick, Mrs. Tredegar complained:

"You take away half the spectacle!"

Giulia tried to draw her away with her, but she resisted.

"I fain would follow the sword," she said, "but I must gather steel to leave the rose."

"I shouldn't leave her either if it weren't for her attendant imps," returned the departing Giulia. "I haven't her demoniac patience."

"Oh, you've 'got the *dainties,*' as Giulietta says!" cried Rosemary. "You wretched lily of the field!"

"The ruling attribute of the denizens of hell is angelic patience," said Helga, and as Giulia went down the stairs her bell-like laugh echoed the cockadoodledoo of Rosemary's. The children burst immediately into uproar, and Helga contemplated them with amazement.

"Quaint society for grown-up women, isn't it?" she said. "I suppose you've been well educated too, *bien élevée* . . . music, poets, algebra, dancing, philosophy, French, physiology, acrobatics, with this end in view."

"The physiology comes in handy," replied Rosemary, laughing. "Also the acrobatics."

"But I suppose," pursued the other, "being early consigned to an almost exclusive association with infants might raise hob with women's intellects, so that men could perhaps find occasion to deride them."

"Men have *derode* them from time immemorial," replied Rosemary, smiling, "and kept witty for it in spite of the weight of serious occupations."

"They won't after *me,*" said Matthew, looking up from his serious occupation. "I'll write to the Corinthians and Ephesians about it."

He left tying up the door and played a tune on his "harmonium."

"She works in secret," said Helga, regarding her hostess narrowly. "Because she is a wonder-worker . . . we don't know what she deals with. She is ether. She combines. She devises with Nothing and with Time. She has great dealings with nothing. She betrays it craftily. She fools it till she has something in her hand, in her 'nook.'. . . She is a thief, a robber of innocent nothing, a traitor. . . . She has an appetite for life and is an intimate of death. Her delights are under water because she is a conspirator, and she is acquainted with subtle Doves. . . . She is Mary, the magician. She is Mab. She smiles like a harmless tiger. Her heart is wilder than a warrior's! *Ridderlig!* Oh, knightly! Oh, my mother!"

As Rosemary for ten years had had scarcely any conversation but that of infants, she smiled and nodded, feeling no surprise, quite at ease with her guest.

Presently she began to laugh at the Littlest Johnny and his wagon, because it was evident that the Old Baby now shared the belated care of Maidie for the Infant Samuel. He was going round with a knit brow and pudgy intentness upon not coming in contact with the velocipede.

"The solicitude in baby eyes! . . . Aside from the miracles and the horrors—there's the fun of the thing." Rosemary's laugh was so hearty that Helga exclaimed,

"Why, you swagger, you swashbuckle! You're a buck madonna!"

"Oh, we're all bucks, my boy, we maternities," roared the madonna with the roar of a pigeon. "Boy" was her term of endearment.

"You're a knave! You're a knave with a nimbus!" cried Mrs. Tredegar. "But you look like thistledown."

"I look like Falstaff half the time."

CHAPTER XIX ONE LADY ANNOYS A GENTLEMAN, AND TWO HIDE IN A CLOSET

AGAIN Giulia was "tatherin' at the bell" of The River House. There was some delay, then Mrs. Chick came to the door. She was barefoot and dressed widely in a little wide red knit jacket, with a full blue cotton skirt looped up over a nether garment of green wool. Her broad face was red and benign. Her ruddy ears seemed pasted on, so tight they were. She was so short that her flat head with its faded yellow hair could have leaned comfortably on Giulia's heart. Her girth, however, would have given Giulia's arm a stretch to compass it. Neither of these measurements was put to the test.

Her bared arms were large, red, and dripping. She was always moist. As Mrs. Tredegar, now descending the stairs, said:

"She is Erda. She is a squatling of the good earth. She comes up out of the earth to do us charities."

Mrs. Chick remained, conveying to Giulia that Mrs. Johnson was not at home.

"No?" said Giulia.

"Not," said Mrs. Chick, holding the door open for Giulia to go. Her idea seemed to be that the visitor's one hope had been to see Mrs. Johnson, and that the hope of her mistress was not to see Giulia. The day of Helga's retreat to the attics was evidently in her mind.

At last she was persuaded to pursue her industries and let the visitor remain.

Mrs. Chick took off her shoes when she came there in the morning from her little house across the hillside fields. There appeared never to be stockings to take off.

Mrs. Tredegar explained that she took pleasure in these noble squarely rooted bare feet. She always paid their come and go her full attention. In stepping, they seemed to give the floor a gentle and firm kiss.

"I know this sort of woman in other countries," she said. "They are little walking hills."

Mrs. Johnson, however, disapproved of bare feet and would say, "Don't you think you might put on your shoes now, Mrs. Chick?"

And Mrs. Chick would smile broadly and say, "Not also."

She had produced nine children, but had missed only nine days, in all, from work. Four infants had died. One was delivered lifeless because Mrs. Chick had carried twenty-four desks upstairs in the school shortly before the date appointed for its appearance. She thought she must have had difficulty in elevating one of the desks to her head and got a blow. For both the baby's hands were found to be broken at the wrist.

"The future labourer's little hands refused," said Mrs. Tredegar. They had declined ploughs and shovels as well as scrub buckets and desks. Mrs. Chick conducted a little farm, beside "doing charities" in several houses. And she had a new intact baby that accompanied her upon her rounds.

When Mrs. Tredegar visited Rosemary in her nursery, she rather bragged of the agility of Mrs. Chick's baby, which she called "ours" as against Rosemary's collection, which were referred to as "yours." She did not wish to derogate from the conceded excellence of Rosemary's, but in simple justice to Mrs. Chick's baby she compared ages and carefully studied accomplishments and attributes.

"Ours doesn't crawl like yours," she would say. "He hops sitting, like a little toad, you know. . . . He took the galley, the kitchen I mean, in fifteen hops, not counting the scuppers, of course. Like a little toad. Very chic. . . . When he tries to stand and comes a cropper he hasn't much to say about it. He doesn't lay up long for repairs. . . . He isn't such a dandy in his dress as yours, and he isn't given to such profound meditation, but . . . He is adherent like the little tree frogs that hang attached on the outside of window screens at night, revealing cherubic tummies to the lamp. He has not, however, tiny round balls like theirs at the ends of his fingers and toes for the purpose of adhesion. . . . When he chirps he does it by flapping his arms, as crickets do it with their wings. . . . The wings of crickets are not used for flying but for music. There are master crickets whose note is more pellucid than his, and indeed than that of ordinary crickets. . . ."

Discoursing on these matters now to Giulia, Mrs. Tredegar was standing beside her guest, leaning on the back of a chair with one foot crossed over the other. Giulia sat on the old carved sofa looking at her hostess. When she was in the room with Helga she seldom took her eyes away from her.

"Did you enjoy your dance with Windy last night?" she asked.

"Rather more than he did."

The evening before they had danced at Giulia's house. Windsor had tried to instruct Helga, who had never had occasion to take a step before.

He had taken her out on the porch, where Rosemary's music came rather faintly. (Rosemary now went visiting as often as she could when she knew Helga would be visiting too.)

The moon would rise much later, but there was an inundation of starlight. Windsor drew Helga about, feeling her powerful legs resolutely keeping out of step.

"You must yield. You must follow me more quickly," he had said.

"Oh, yes," she replied. "One does it quickly like a noble action . . . like Peter going straight out to his Lord. . . . There should be a scientific inquiry into the character of feet that walk on water and into that of those that walk on air. . . . The latter would have the cloud-hewn arch."

"You are so fond of your notions that you stick like a steer in the road," he complained. "A very nice steer, of course."

He pressed her against him impatiently. Her unamenable limbs enraged him. He felt he would like to take her round those knees that were so at loggerheads with his own and crush them rather hard. She seemed so much heavier than he had thought. He was much angrier than was his habit.

"I feel like a wretched Atlas," he said.

"Give it up," she returned. "You see, I've never been taught to do anything in concert with others. I'm outlandish."

"I will not give it up. . . . Here, put your hand properly on my shoulder. Let go. Haven't you ever had a man's arm round you before?"

"It is your hurt arm that is leading me. It is not strong enough. The other is too strong."

"You say you have never done anything in concert with another," said Windsor perversely. "You are frightened to death of a kiss. . . . Have you never known anything about love? . . ."

"Don't speak of that horrible thing," she had replied, coming to a stand. "I stink to heaven of dead love."

She was telling this to Giulia, her visitor.

"Good heavens!" cried that lady from the old carved sofa. "Did you say that to Windsor?"

"Yes."

"What did he do?"

"His gorge rose."

"I believe you," said Giulia.

"His eyebrows were wringing their hands."

"And then?"

"Well, then," said Mrs. Tredegar, shifting her weight as she stood, and changing her crossed feet, "then he told me that I was in love with him!"

"And were you?" asked Giulia.

"I told him what I should abhor would be to see *another* in love. . . . It is the atrocious sign of reciprocation that I mind. . . . He said I was the first mortal, in that case, that did not watch like a damned lynx for it."

"For reciprocation?" asked Giulia.

"Yes," said Mrs. Tredegar. "Then he laughed and said it was odd I should abhor to see it; that men had been described as more interesting, more vivid, or more like the crested dove under the influence of the blessed state. . . . He said all this, I think, because he was rasped by my dancing so abominably. I had been like a thousand pounds of lead for his hurt arm."

"And what did you say to the crested dove?" inquired Giulia.

"Well, I told him that what I don't want to see is the horrible *extra* heat. . . . It is too much like anger."

"Come and sit beside me," said Giulia.

"No, stand by me."

The two women went to the window. The river flowed beneath them like the faintly waving expanse of woman's hair, or horse's tail spread in a fragile wind. Farther out there was a track of ripples exact as the shells of a pine cone, or the closely lapping feathers of a bird. Beyond that the water lay like glass and received the inverted mass of exultant foliage and mountains plunging head down like a diver. Nearer, up river, was the cove where Helga bathed, screened by a bulk of rock that projected into the flow. There were rapids there, broken waves conversing about a great stone like a monster's head in a black muse. The water kissed his flat Ethiopian meditative face with incessant kissing and laid itself eternally between his lips.

"Why are you telling me all this about what happened between you and Windsor?" asked Giulia.

"Well, I thought, for once, just once, I would try to get a little female comfort out of a woman who wasn't a saint."

"Do you view me as a sinner?"

"From my point of view you're a new-born lamb," replied Helga. "But I know you are not a saint by the brutal ease I feel with you. I don't have to handle you with ivory tongs for awe of the bloom."

"Have I no bloom?" asked Giulia.

"There is no feather to impair the lucid steel of your surface."

"It's killing me to think of *you* with ivory tongs for the sake of a saint—or of *anything* fragile." Giulia gave her lovely laugh, her single "bell."

"Why? What is the matter with me?"

"You're a whole herd of bulls in the shop."

"*O, min Gud!* And I go about as if I were walking on eggs. What I want to know from you is, do you think that was a disgusting conversation?"

"Well . . . a little on the disgusting side," conceded Giulia.

"And he was justified in the rising of his gorge?" asked Mrs. Tredegar somewhat anxiously.

"I feel that Windy was very rude," said Giulia.

"He was as rude as a drop of dew," returned Mrs. Tredegar, wringing her hands. "But there are little creatures that can be crushed to death by a drop of dew."

"Yet you live to tell the tale. You *can* tell it," said Giulia, with a needle of irony in her haystack of warm emotions.

"Ah, that is my exploit!" cried the other, throwing her arms out in a kind of exhilaration.

"Exploit?" Giulia marvelled a little. Her subtle soul inquired . . . An exploit to test me?

"It is my exploit. . . . My first *tell*."

The guest had an almost irresistible inclination to take Helga in the circle of her arm, to press her as Windsor had done, against her breast. What momentous concession given by the trivial decree of the dance! She resisted. Mrs. Tredegar seemed as hard to come by, as unwieldy as the moon.

"Your first?" she said, simulating an innocent absence of avidity. "Then I shall get *everything* out of you."

The narrow eyes of Mrs. Tredegar widened, stared, and narrowed again to a mere horizontal loophole. Giulia was rather fascinated by this appearance. Presently it passed as if with a return of good faith, and Helga said:

"No, there is too much chivalry between us."

"You mean on your side as well as mine, the teller's as well as the questioner's?" asked Giulia.

"More."

There was the sound of an opening door below.

"Heavens! There she is!" cried Mrs. Tredegar.

The voice of Mrs. Johnson, the returned housekeeper, was heard speaking to Mrs. Chick on the stairs. Helga started away from the window and with stealthy action drew her guest into a closet and closed the door.

"Until she goes, you know," she explained. "We mustn't risk anything."

"What, for instance?" asked Giulia in the darkness.

"Well, our security," said Mrs. Tredegar. "The security we feel in just charmingly . . . not being seen . . . in her not being really sure we are in the house."

"Oh, I see," returned the other. She did not in the least see, but she relinquished herself to amusement and curiosity, huddling quietly in the dark, her shoulder pressed against the firm rounded shoulder beside her.

"She's standing there. . . . I can hear her breathe," said Mrs. Tredegar. But after a while she concluded,

"This is blithering nonsense, you know. . . . Can you think of anything that *could* get her more alive to us?"

"Not easily," said Giulia.

The gaping housekeeper now beheld the door of the closet open and the two ladies emerge from among the hanging garments of the deceased Mr. Tredegar.

"There's a man and a fellow," she said sternly.

"Oh, God!" exclaimed Mrs. Tredegar.

"The plasterer and his boy. . . . If bathtubs is left running over this morning while ladies of the house are hiding in attics behind trunks, what can you expect but plasterers?"

Mrs. Johnson's tone was caustic. She withdrew with an erect carriage to escort the plasterers to the scene of their labours. But she returned, putting her head in the door to fix her mistress with an eye in which some unusual emotion glared forth.

"Blinko slept with me last night," she said with pride and defiance.

"Indeed? I missed him."

"And this morning he came up from the foot and was playing with my hair."

Mrs. Tredegar smiled congratulations, glancing at that stern gray stuff so firmly reduced to extreme flatness upon Mrs. Johnson's head.

"I've told Mrs. Chick," added Mrs. Johnson, and closed the door with a slight slam.

"Why did you hide in the attic this morning?" inquired Giulia.

"As good a place as another."

"But why hide?"

"Well, one does, you know," said Helga. "Don't you?"

An almost imperceptible flush passed across Giulia's cheek. "Why should I?"

"Nine times out of ten the pursuit is imaginary," said the other. "We are always attributing intention to people who are blundering too near when there's nothing in it but a sluggishness of perception. . . . Of course, it wasn't that in Windsor's case. . . ."

"Oh, you were hiding from *him*, then!" cried Giulia, laughing out. "Did he come to give you another lesson in the dance?"

"There was no reason why he shouldn't have been walking in the morning by the river," continued the other, as if reasoning with herself, "and have come near to listen to the pigeons, the Venetian Canticle."

"But you preferred to be on the safe side behind the trunks in the attic," concluded Giulia, stretching herself on the old sofa to luxuriate in her amusement. "There's no getting at what you have in that abyss we might call your mind," she went on, "and that's the fun about you. . . . But Mrs. Johnson's temperament is highly impervious to fun, so I don't think she will be able to put up with you."

"You mean, you think she might actually . . . leave me?"

"I shouldn't be at all surprised."

"You let loose trumpets and clarions," said Mrs. Tredegar. "If that's the way you feel about it, why haven't you eliminated her yourself?"

Giulia found herself laughing at the look of complete amazement in the other's face. It was evident that such a possibility had not entered her mind; nor could it now find entrance. She was a house mistress entirely without authority.

"But you think, if I go on being as intolerable as I am . . . ?" she said, after a moment.

"Oh, you'll go on," smiled the guest.

"Why must I?"

"Because you haven't the faintest idea how intolerable you are."

" 'That's the humour of it,' " said Helga. There was a pause.

"Tell me," she inquired presently, with an interest entirely dispassionate, "do you, the discriminating one, think that I have something less than the usual human intelligence?"

"I think you are mad as a hatter, my dear."

"And Windsor, does he think so too?" asked Helga with the same dispassionateness.

"Oh, infinitely more than I." Giulia gave her curious laugh again. She laughed oftener with Helga than with anyone. "The beauty of it is that we can have you. All of us. That it hasn't occurred to anyone to incarcerate you and spoil it all. We have you to the top of our bent—just like that. What luck that you are all that you are and yet not inconveniently dangerous."

"Oh, I'm dangerous."

"Well, then, all the better. But let only me have that. Give *me* the best of it. How vain I am! I shall treasure your partiality. But it won't interfere with my going on wondering and speculating with the rest. I shall keep up with the chorus continually chanting the quaint vulgarism, 'How do you get that way?' "

"Blessed be the vulgar!" said Helga. "I've heard Charles utter that incomparable phrase. It has everything of all inquiry in it. One could say it so well to the planetary system. Or Semele, when she had begged her divine lover too long to uncover his face, might beautifully have said it as she burned to nothing under the stress of the beatific vision. Her ashes, with a last stirring, might have murmured, 'Way'!"

"Good heavens!" was the guest's comment.

The two women were silent for a while, Giulia speculatively watching the look of Helga, which had taken on its masklike incommunicativeness, when her eyes seemed almost to be closed. She was probably still brooding on the images she had evoked. But what the devil—Giulia permitted herself comfortable phrases when she mused—what the devil was the nature of a woman who could take such a flight in the midst of a discussion of her own madness? Could it have been a preposterous trick for diverting the conversation?

She began to feel a slight oppression upon her spirits. There was too much of the unplumbed, salt, and estranging in this woman. She was invaded by that loneliness one feels in the presence of persons walled away by insurmountable difference.

Presently she felt the other's eyes lift and rest upon her face with an intense examination.

"How do you get that way?" said Helga, without any indication of smiling. "I wish you were 'my home of love.' "

"Well, I am half in love with you, you know," returned Giulia, after a rather long arrest. "I might be more if you didn't try to make an ass of me."

"Of you?" There was open horror in Helga's expression.

"I don't mind your doing it with the others—even with Windsor. But I think you might let *me* in . . . confide in *me*."

"What confidence would you expect from a mind diseased?"

"Oh, reason holds a firm seat in that distracted globe. As you say, that's the humour of it."

"And would I love you more if you confided in me?" asked Helga, with her most penetrating regard.

"Oh, I," returned the guest, rising suddenly, "I have nothing to confide. I am not a mysterious stranger with a pack of secrets on my back."

"Oh, you have secrets. There is nothing that you haven't. You are the home of love. The Vatican. And heretics must starve outside."

Helga turned away to the window, apparently unaware that Giulia had become alert and rigid behind her. She looked out at the slowly moving broad river, revealing the strength of her back, the robustness of her neck widening to the shoulder. The fine and fragile Giulia slowly let go her alert in contemplating the shape there. Her attention was always ready to be fixed upon the appearance of that slim yet stalwart structure, so definitely contrasted to her own.

Helga once remarking that attention had said that she felt like a mastodon examined by a greyhound.

As she leaned against the window, now, her powerful frame relaxed into a fatigued and drooping contemplation, her neck sank forward, her brow leaning on the lifted arm which rested against the sash. She made no bones of turning her back on her guest and taking her time for whatever was occupying her. Some moments passed so. The guest drew her gloves on with leisurely pressures, never taking her eyes off that rear which seemed to grow more insubstantial in its aspect of secrecy or sorrow. Giulia went nearer, and doing so, got the range of the window more widely. She stopped, very alert indeed. Down on the bank by the river's edge, to the left and half hidden by boughs, stood Windsor, waiting.

She interrogated Mrs. Tredegar's back like an X-ray. All her forces became one definite piercing desire to know, to be sure, whether that drooping head held the knowledge of that presence. At the first moment of her discovery she had been convinced, and the whole attitude of her hostess took on an aspect of repellent subterfuge.

The guest's wits were at work. . . . No, if Mrs. Tredegar had seen and wished to appear not to have seen, she would have come directly—no, slowly, rather carelessly and slowly—away from the window. Quite away. Her remaining there left her open—was almost an invitation—to her guest's approach. No, she had not seen, and suddenly Giulia did not wish her to see. She quite emphatically did not wish her to see Windsor waiting there.

She was rapidly thinking that when she went out she would summon him and make him go away with her. She was not sure whether it would be from a lover's reason, or to protect Helga from a recurrence of the trouble of last night. . . . She would beckon when she went out. . . . He was still there. . . . No, now he had glanced up at the house and gone out of sight behind the boughs. Helga had not changed her attitude. She did not know that he had been there.

"I must leave you," said Giulia.

"I know," said the other, not turning from the river. "And so this big sluggard out here is ponderous with tears."

Seeing that she did not mean to observe any ceremony of farewell, Giulia, with an obstinate impulse, went to the extraordinary hostess and drew her round by the shoulder. The revealed face was perfectly calm, but a rivulet ran down from either eye.

"For God's sake, what have I done?" exclaimed Giulia almost aghast. "You look like a faun in the rain."

Helga wiped her eyes on a silk tassel that hung from her girdle. She was apt not to have a handkerchief by her, and would dry her hands on her petticoat or a leaf.

She stood looking down at the tassel which she waved idly to and fro.

"I suppose fauns wipe their tears on each other's tails," she remarked, and nothing further was said upon the matter.

CHAPTER XX A GENTLEMAN ANNOYED AGAIN: BY A LADY'S EXAMINING HIS BEDROOM

A WEEK or two had elapsed. Giulia, keeping an attentive eye on Windsor and Helga, got no sign that they had met alone. There was no indication in Mrs. Tredegar's manner the day after Giulia's visit to The River House that Windsor had come in after her departure.

Yet he had been definitely waiting there by the river. He must have come with the intention of visiting Mrs. Tredegar, but, seeing Giulia enter, had waited for her to go.

But he must have thought better of it, and foregone his visit.

When the friends were gathered together in the various houses Windsor scarcely noticed the stranger. She, however, went on, as she had begun, apparently unable to keep from perusing him—if indeed it had occurred to her to try.

Everybody kept an eye on Mrs. Tredegar; not the least observant was the fairylike Sylvia.

"Your goblin was here to-day, Windy," she was saying to him. They were on the lawn at his house, and she had been showing him where she wished to extend the turf. There was a neglected strip shut off by a rank of rose bushes at the side of the house and misappropriated by the servants for clothes lines and the drying of linen.

When this rather disgraced area joined the lawn, there would be a handsomer expanse, almost as handsome as Giulia's.

"Why do you call her *my* goblin?"

He did not look so bored as a moment before.

"She wanted to see you very particularly," said Sylvia, disregarding his question.

"Anything important?"

"She said it was important to her . . . very."

"Well?" he inquired.

"To see you every day."

"Did she say precisely that?" he asked.

"That's exactly what she said. She'd climbed the hill on her tough legs to get a glimpse of you. . . . She's so odd, isn't she? She said she didn't want any sun to go down upon her windlessness. She said she hadn't seen you yesterday, and there was no wind in the sails of the night. I suppose she meant she couldn't sleep. . . . I really think it would be nicer if you two weren't quite so public with your flirting."

"Great God, do you call it flirting?" He would have gone away if he had not been so inclined to hear what else the visitor had said and done.

"I know it isn't, of course. You wouldn't flirt with anybody but Giulia. She'd miss it so. . . . But Mrs. Tredegar is so indiscreet. She blurts out such odd things."

"What else did she say?"

"The tough Mrs. Tredegar was in a dreadful condition. Her dress was a sort of mousseline de soie, very thin, with tiny roses on it. You could see right through it, and her petticoat, or whatever it was, was too short. Her stockings were rolled down and gartered below the knee, as Giulietta does it, and you could see through to her naked knees as plain as day. She must have got away without Mrs. Johnson being able to catch her. Mrs. Johnson wouldn't have allowed it."

"Did you like her knees?" inquired the husband.

"Well, to a little person like me they seemed very large and rounded and dimpled."

Windsor leaned on the back of a green garden chair and watched Prince Igor, the peacock, spread the ineffectual splendour of his tail. He lifted up a widowed cry.

"You sound as if they had no anatomy," said Windsor.

"Oh, I didn't mean they didn't have anatomy, and plenty of it. I suppose some people would think they were delicious."

"Well, let's leave her delicious knees alone," said he. "What else did she say?"

The bereaved peacock carried his weight of splendour along the disgraced plot of ground, beyond the still unbudding rose bushes. He gave a longer cry, as if he were entreating his faithless friend to bring back her wonder to his fruitless pomp.

"I was showing her that horrid spot of the lawn," said Sylvia, reminded of another of her guest's speeches, "and told her my plan for returfing it. Prince Igor was parading himself there. I was rather apologizing for the look of it as it is now, when she said, 'Oh, it doesn't matter. I can't see the lawn for the peacocks.' "

" 'But there's only one,' I said. 'Is it possible!' said she. 'I thought there were a thousand.' "

Windsor made no comment upon this: his eye fixed in a look of pleasure.

"You never know what she will say," pursued his wife. "What do you suppose she brought out about the town? She said she wouldn't be surprised if everybody was properly married here, and that nobody had killed any of his parents or friends. When I assured her that everybody was, and nobody had, she had the face to ask me——"

Sylvia stopped in some confusion.

"What did she ask you? Out with it."

"She said, 'And are you all quite, quite married?' "

The narrator smoothed down her dress over her tiny thighs, as if some rude hand had rumpled it. "Of course you never know when she's joking. She has that dreadful way."

Windsor was incapable of any utterance for some time. Then he lit a cigarette and asked:

"Well, who could have told her?"

"Windy, you know I've never told that to a single soul except my pastor, and he gave me his word of honour he wouldn't tell." She did not think it necessary to say there had been more than one receptive pastor.

It was to be remarked that, with all her obtuseness, she knew it was not necessary to ask Windsor if he had communicated the secret.

"No," Sylvia concluded, with a rather awed look. "She *is* a goblin. There isn't a thing in the world that woman couldn't guess."

"No, no," said Windsor, after reflection. "She didn't guess, or she wouldn't have said it."

"I suppose you think she would be too decent. You know her so well."

"Oh, I don't know her at all," he returned impatiently. "But she wouldn't. She probably meant that she didn't think a lot of us had stuff enough in us to be quite married. And she's right. Our marriage is as good as any of them—better."

After a little Sylvia said, "You would have been gladder if she *had* guessed about us."

"In Heaven's name, why?" he exclaimed, coming out of a muse.

"You looked glad in that moment when you believed it."

"I looked glad? Why should I be?" he exclaimed.

"Because she would know then that there was no real barrier between you."

"Barrier between us!" He stared at her in a manner that startled her into fluttering, but she continued:

"That the only barrier would be Giulia."

"Sylvia!" he said so suddenly and intensely that she gave a little leap. "I forbade you long ago to make that implication."

She was silent, looking away from him with the iron obstinacy of the timid.

She had no jealousy, for her love of him was nearly as long dead as his for her. That little passion had flickered out like a tuppenny candle in the wind of his refusal to accept her belated pardon. But her coldness toward him had no contempt in it such as made his coldness for her so irremediably cold.

She really did not care if he loved, nor whom he loved, as long as it was sufficiently secret. She liked her little position in their circle as his wife. It had grown to be with her a matter of supreme convenience. The house, the lawn, the garden, her dress, and her church had consoled her for that early mistake and the immediate complete loss.

The only real affliction was the absence of a baby. And yet that had its bright side. Babies were incompatible with tidy houses. Another, kinder, pastor had succeeded the deceased Mr. Worthington, who had advised her to relent, and this one, the Reverend George, an innocent young man, had received her story in his turn, but in a graver manner, and treated her as a saint. He would take her little hands between his and be sorry over the cross she bore so patiently. She even felt at moments he almost wished that Heaven had made him such a woman. Rosemary did not shine as a housekeeper, and she was perhaps a little too proud of Jackie's being so crazy about her. Poor thing, she was always having babies, and frequently not quite well. Sylvia took jellies to the wife and was blessed by the husband. The Reverend George did not enjoy the society of Windsor. He not only felt afraid of him as an immoral man, but he suspected him of levity toward the cloth. He need not have been perturbed. Windsor did not think of George at all. It was only Jackie whose soul's gaze was fixed upon him, blasting as the eye of a basilisk.

"I know it is an old-fashioned word," resumed Sylvia on the lawn, "I am rather an old-fashioned woman, I suppose. But do you think Mrs. Tredegar is quite genteel? I mean, is it quite genteel to be so very amusing?"

"Genteel!" said Windsor. "It's royal!"

"Yes, that's what I mean," said Mrs. Windsor, rather flustered. "You always express everything so much better than I do."

Sometimes she hurried to agree with him, as she might make haste to catch a falling vase.

"I told her you'd been looking rather pale lately; that your tummy was up to tricks again."

"What prompted that brilliant bit?" he inquired.

"She asked how you were. . . . And then she said that scientific thing that I don't believe is scientific." . .

"What?"

"Wait a minute. . . . Oh, yes. . . . She said, 'The pole trembles under the yearning of the needle.' "

Windsor went toward the house.

"I'm going up to see Mother," he said.

"I wish you'd wait till I get her tidied up for dinner," cried Sylvia. "You always choose the time when she's at her messiest."

"I like her that way."

"Luckily I'd just changed her for lunch when Mrs. Tredegar was here," pursued Sylvia. "She *would* go up . . . and what do you suppose she said?"

"God knows!"

"She said she came to drown her heart in the river, and she was at least going to cool it in the source."

Windsor's mother never left her room, but sat in state in a wheeled chair. She did not suffer, but through some condition or other of her mechanism she had ceased to get about.

She was a little crumpled old lady. Having been a wife and mother, she could not get used to being comfortable and cared for. She would slip some of her pillows out when she heard Sylvia coming, and put them into the chair beside her. . . . "That chair's too deep for such a tiny creature. . . . And you do work —so *horribly*. . . . How is Windy's tum? Digesting nicely?"

While Sylvia's one idea was to get the dear old thing tidied, she would be making a nuisance of herself trying to save her daughter-in-law the bother.

"I'm going to change your waist. You've got a spot again," Sylvia would say.

"Oh, I'll do. I'll do."

"No, dear, you won't do."

"You've changed me twice to-day, already," the invalid would protest. "I don't think it's respectful to change an old lady more than twice a day."

"Now, don't be naughty." Sylvia would be deftly unbuttoning. "If you'd put your nappy-nap in your collar, you wouldn't spotty-spot and have to changey-change."

"In my time it was thought very ill bred to put your napkin in your collar. But everything's ill bred nowadays, what with legs here and legs there, and drawers a mere nothing." (The mighty resurgence of long-skirtedness had not yet brought back the sheathed woman.)

"Yes, dear," absently, Sylvia slipping the old lady's garments off and on.

"And no corsets. We used to eat when we got home and unlaced. Couldn't when we were in them and in public. But that made us all the daintier. . . . Ladies eat with absolute recklessness nowadays. . . . As for lower limbs. They were unknown as Africa. In spite of accidents. . . . Wonderful how skirts stayed down! After all, the attraction of gravity does *so* much for one. . . . Of course, if actually standing on our heads it would have been against us. . . . But, nowadays, there's nothing for gravitation to get hold of, in either case. . . . We thought it was nice to have babies. . . . But, of course, we *did* have skirts."

Now she was worried for fear she might have touched Sylvia on the raw. She thought a great deal about Windsor's having no baby . . . and Jackie not marrying because of Rosemary. She would tell Sylvia it was so nice not to have a baby, because of things being so much tidier.

She had the mother's sweet indifference to truth, the sedative placating hospitable tones developed by years of temporizing, soothing the savage breast of husband and child. There had been five boys, but three had died in an epidemic when the family had gone "abroad." Perhaps that was why Windy and Jackie were so attached to each other.

She didn't care what answers she gave, so long as there was no possibility of producing friction. Her utterance conveyed:

"You will find me in complete accord with anything you may say. So don't be dreadful."

Helga had said to her, "You are like Rosemary. You pet everything you touch."

The old lady's voice was a lullaby. Beside its inoffensiveness, the lightest tone of her late husband had sounded like a *casus belli.* He was a bilious man. She would say:

"I was the Casabianca, and he provided the burning deck. . . . But he was very fond of me when he wasn't bilious. . . . Never expect a man to love you if he has a *malaise* of any kind. . . . Women can, of course. . . . It doesn't *matter* with women, because they're almost always in pain. . . . He was even more bilious in his youth, and so he was terribly slow about falling in love with me. It was a great nuisance. I used to die almost over his good looks. . . . Windy and Jackie have got his nose. . . . Of course it's different when you see a man with nothing on but his Adam's apple. Yet, certainly a distinguished-looking chap under *any* conditions."

No criticism of man or beast ever passed without her mitigating murmur. She would find virtue in the worst of scoundrels, if only that he had a good digestion.

When Sylvia told her that Mrs. Tredegar didn't know how to behave she said:

"Well, everybody's given up behaving nowadays. So it won't be noticed. I like the way she gnashes her teeth."

"Gnashes!"

"When she knocks things over."

"Knocks!"

"But she scarcely swears at all," lullabied the old lady. "Just called once on her Maker in a rather religious way. . . . It was only one of *my* teacups."

Sylvia did not permit her charge to use the more fragile wear . . . trays going up and down, and maids what they are.

The old lady was very proud of Jackie's conduct during the war, and kept his medals, shoulder straps, etc., in the drawer of her little table.

"Windy, my eldest son, had not the privilege of going. His health did not permit."

She would say this with a gentle primness, as if giving his excuses for having been kept from an afternoon tea. And, in saying it, she would keep an eye out for signs lest a certain rumour might have reached the listener of Windy's having brought about the prohibitive state of health himself . . . the furtive eye of maternity.

Now, when Windsor came up, she whispered in a flutter, "Don't let her tidy me yet." But, seeing that Sylvia was not with him, she settled herself for a chat. She patted his back instead of kissing him, having always been shy with her children. Then she took a buttered scone and a dab of jelly from the drawer of her table. These were sitting on a piece of paper, for Sylvia preferred not to have a mess of dishes left in the room. The old lady always thought of others when she was eating, and put by a crumb, as she had done when the boys were little and hungry. . . . Sylvia *might* like a bite (though she never did), and Rosemary might drop in, ravenous from maternal cares.

Sometimes, when it had waited a while, she would eat the crumb herself, like a desperado.

"I don't care if they're starving!" she would hurl at her conscience. "I'm an old woman, and it's long to tea!"

At other times her better nature triumphed, and she would open the drawer from time to time, taking only a tiny nibble.

Windsor declined nourishment, and the old lady ate the scone.

"I was thinking," she said, "how frightened I used to be when you boys came home after a long absence. The first moments are so awful! Everybody looks different. I'd never know how wise you'd got. . . . And I was so afraid you'd notice I was getting less and less pretty. . . . Now, it's almost a *duty* for an old lady like me not to be pretty. That's such a comfort. . . . I'd look a perfect fool going round at my age as pretty as Rosemary. . . . Jackie used to say, 'A home-coming, after a lapse of time, is the very devil.' (Always *would* use bad language from knee-high to a grasshopper.) 'If you say the right thing, it's tiresome, and if you don't, it's unfortunate.' "

Windsor looked tender, taking in that his little waiting fluttering mother in the porch had been frightened of them. He had been frightened, too, in home-comings, at the emotion that tormented him.

"I hear you've had a visitor," he said.

"Oh, yes, the tough Mrs. Tredegar. That's what Sylvia calls her. And she certainly does look *well.* She called me a nosegay. Does she always walk about so much in houses . . . and look at things so hard? It's so sweet of her. . . . Very few people notice the pretty things you put about for them, and the nice things to eat. . . . We're all too polite to be grateful."

"Did you really like it?" he asked.

"It gave me the fidgets . . . just a little," the old lady replied, "but, on the whole, I like it. . . . Yet, perhaps, on the whole, it's more comfortable when people are ungrateful."

They laughed together. She was much more at ease with Windy than with Jackie. She would always feel for him, however, that uneasy tenderness, love-without-trust, since his behaviour during the war. Jackie had been the hero, the pride of her heart—though since his return from France he had been about as pleasant company as a hedgehog. . . . If Rosemary had only married him, like a human being, instead of turning saint and marrying the Church!

"Yet there's something lovely about that beautiful kind curiosity," said the old lady, still with Mrs. Tredegar in mind. "She went into your bedroom. . . . She said she'd been in your study downstairs . . . though she thought Sylvia was on tenterhooks with her prowling around . . . like a hyena, as she put it. . . . She says some rather low words, and then quite beautiful ones. Beautiful and rather—well—strident . . . like bizarre colours, don't you think? But I've heard so many things in my time with you boys. So many jargons have passed over my head, as old Mr. Brewster says, having travelled so much."

"Why did you let her go into my bedroom?" asked Windsor.

"What could I do with that great thumping thing! Sylvia had gone down. . . . I couldn't go on my knees, and I couldn't very well ring and say 'This terrible Turk is going to violate my son's bedroom.' "

What she had really done was to say in her most hospitable voice: "*Do* go in, dear. It's such a lovely room, a little bit austere, but pleasant . . . so like Windy."

"I won't have women in my bedroom!" said Windsor. "What did she say when she came out?"

"Well, something quite extraordinary. . . ." The old lady reflected a moment. "She said, 'So it is *there* lame majesty couches its broken wing.' "

She cocked a bright eye at her son. Her little finely wrinkled face was alive as a tomtit.

"Doesn't that amuse you? Aren't you pleased?"

"I don't like being amused," said he, walking away toward the window. He smiled rather sardonically. "Wasn't there an old Greek who said he'd rather die than feel pleasure?"

"No, but really the woman is very, very sweet."

"The woman is very, very crazy," said he.

"Oh, that would explain everything *so* nicely."

CHAPTER XXI JACKIE MAKES A HORRID DISCOURSE, WHICH IS ABRUPTLY CLOSED

I'M THINKING of using you as a heart-heal, a salutary herb," said Jackie.

The brothers had met Mrs. Tredegar walking in the fields.

"Oh, I don't know if there's enough of her," said Windsor. "I've thought of utilizing her in that sort myself."

"You are children of the same god," said Helga. "Your father had a hawk's head."

Sometimes, when people were talking about her, she had an appearance of not comprehending, or even of not trying to comprehend.

They were sitting on a shady bank in a little wild garden of lilies-of-the-valley at the edge of a hillside field.

"See, it is patiently following its formula; leaning up its leaf," she said of one of the spires of bells.

Below them was a brook almost lost in sedge. It flowed meanderingly down the fields to fall into the river beside Helga's house. Above the sound of the river, clear as dew, she could hear the little frogs piping in this brook the whole night long.

Jackie got up and strolled away among the iris that was purpling the bank.

"When you sit like that," said Windsor, "you look as if you had powers of reverie beyond calculation."

"Like a deep, deep cat," she rejoined.

"Or a lone wolf. But what do you want?" he asked. "What of all things would you rather do?"

"Talk. . . ."

She had hesitated a little, and wore what he thought of as her rather befuddled look.

"Among a pack of ideas there is one beast that runs with a word on his back. . . . I don't see why you try to get me, though. I let you alone. I only look. But you're like a ferret, when you see I'm there at all, a ferret digging at an empty mole-hill. Rest your paws. There's nothing there. Giulia said it was rather on the disgusting side, your asking me about things that night you were teaching me to dance."

"So you told her, unconscionable woman!" He smiled with the idea of what Giulia must have been thinking. She might at least have told him of Mrs. Tredegar's recital, so they could have discussed her ghastly utterance together.

"I don't try to get at you. I've got you all I need, like dew," she was saying.

"Oh, yes, you do try to get at me," he rejoined. "If you didn't, feeling about me as you do, you'd be an imbecile."

"Feeling about you!" She reflected a little on this. "Oh, I get enough without bleeding my paws. I don't ask for the entrails of the rooted earth."

"Rooted to what?"

She stopped a moment, to arrange her meaning, slightly "befuddled."

"Well, laced with roots of flowers and trees . . . and also rooted in space, and in the heart."

"And you would rather talk than anything else, incorrigible poet."

"I couldn't write a line of poetry to save my dead soul," said she.

"You're a perpetual wind writing on air," said Jackie, returning to them, and throwing himself down on the bank again. He glared up at her with his single eye, the blasted one calm and filmed. Both young men had taken off their coats and were exhibited in their belted shirts. Jackie's person exhaled more heat than Windsor's, was more apparent, more exposed.

"Well, you are air poets, too, then," said Helga. "You both gauze the day."

"I don't do any gauzing of the day when I'm not with you," Jackie returned. "You goad me to it. You goad me to it as my mother goaded me into the war."

"Your mother. That nurse of men. That Nosegay!" Helga meditated. Presently she asked, "And did you gauze the war?"

"I was a squatting dumb disgust."

"And how did the Nosegay do it?" she asked.

"In all the ways of women. . . . She thought I was so pretty in my coat of mail. She was in love with buttons. I had another bee in my bonnet. The same that Windy had. . . . We had just joined a bunch of idiots going to Copenhagen with several reasonable proposals; proposals so practical, we thought, that even a billion asses and shopkeepers might have stopped braying long enough to listen. It was the only thing Windy ever cared about immoderately. Giulia, too. . . . I was ready as Paul. . . . I wanted only the road to Damascus. I wanted to howl on street corners. . . . I wanted a prison worse than a lover. . . . It was the last caper of adolescence. . . . Giulia saw it all. . . . I capering with Windy—big brother. And then, when they had us. When they were breaking the bones of our dreams, he did the only thing possible. He killed himself and got out. . . ."

"He killed himself," said Helga, as if she were wool-gathering. "And your mother?"

"My father was there, too, full of bile, and all the lot. They hounded me into it. They were full to bursting with noble notions. The Nosegay was the worst. . . . The eldest boy had failed. Windy had made his get-away."

Windsor, lying on his front playing with the flowers and grass, gave a sound of distaste, immediately suppressed.

"The Nosegay had to have her hero, her lollipop. . . . She had paid for it in her youth. . . . She had not given me my life, but lent it. . . . And she called in the loan. . . . Are you listening?"

Helga bowed her head. Windsor looked at her sidelong with compassion, and at his brother with amazement. He had never heard Jackie let loose on this subject before.

"I was the little brother, but I had to pay for Windy's weak tum," Jackie went on. "It was as if my mother had made me straight, reserving the right to deform me. She stultified my dearest purpose. She broke my heart. She made an ass of me."

"You aren't quite fair to the Nosegay, you know," said Windsor, in a low tone, as if against his will.

"I don't want to be fair. I want to be beastly."

"You're a bear with a sore head, Jackie. Can it. There's no use battering against things as they are. . . . What do you expect of a Nosegay? Anachronism, the mental state of a hundred years hence?"

"No, the heart's state of a hundred ages past. . . . You remember the linen closet where we used to play there were white wolves? She put me in there once for punishment . . . and snatched me back, bawling as loud as I. . . . She was alive then."

"Well, I can't quite join you in this more recent bawling," said Windsor, in that low voice disinclined for discussion, so at variance with his brother's belligerent tones.

"Of course you can't, my dear. We don't operate the same under the same tests. . . . Human feeling is dead in you. Inhuman feeling is alive in me. Your *geist* induced you to kill yourself in decorous silence. Mine induced me to stay alive and bawl."

"Well, do it at the bald shopkeepers of life, then. Don't do it at Nosegays and Mrs. Tredegar, who's ready to drop."

"Am I permitted to bawl at Dad, who passed his whole life afraid of a stomach-ache and enthusiastically sent my stomach to be broached by a bullet?"

"Oh, *pax, pax!*" murmured Windsor. "Let them all alone."

"They didn't let my girl alone," returned the other. "As soon as they got me off, they gave her to a sheep."

"Jackie, there *is* something to be said of Rosemary's own volition, but I refrain."

"Refraining is the best thing you do."

Windsor was sorry he had not entirely refrained, as his brother now looked more excited. The scar that ran down his temple and cheek bone grew red—a jagged stroke of lightning.

"Do you think for a minute," he cried, "if I'd been here, that the Reverend Dub would have got her?"

"Rosemary, though a swasher, is all for the angels," said Mrs. Tredegar. "We bawling fiends must cede and e'en give her up."

"Funny, I made a verse," said Jackie.

"She gave us each a kiss,
And said, 'I'll follow this.'
She bade us all good-bye,
And said, 'Though I die.'
She would not stop to sup,
But said, 'Now give me up.

" 'Give me up without a word,
As the nest gives up the bird;
As apostates leave the Pope,
As the heart gives up the hope,
As the branch gives up the leaf,
And as Time gives up its grief.'

"She would not stop to sup.
But she said, 'Now give me up.' "

Mrs. Tredegar was very much impressed and said, "You are a poet," with awe.

"I'm the only man that ever made two kindred words kiss each other in this town in three hundred years," said Jackie. "Do you wonder I bawl with loneliness?"

They were silent a while, then he resumed, "And since the war 'I cannot eat but little meat, my stomach is not good. But, oh, I think that I can drink.' . . . That's what Windy always says about his tum, though he isn't so strong on the drink. . . . When they put him in training camp and made him run a bayonet through the tum of a manikin, his own went to pot. Fair youth and fortunate!"

"And the Nosegay is your true physical mother?" asked Helga.

"I have no mother." Jackie flung himself over on the grass and laughed and yawned. The sunlight gleamed on his long fine teeth, over which his lips closed with difficulty, as with Windsor and Giulia.

"I've been sedulously administering sedatives ever since."

"So, you are a murderer, too!" said Mrs. Tredegar.

"Of course."

"Do you positively know?"

"Good God, yes! I was one of the lucky dogs. They pinned a trinket on me, instead of branding my brow. That's where our decorations should have been cut."

Helga was looking at his fine, almost womanish hands playing with the closely serried small bells of the lily-of-the-valley. Her head swam an instant as she imagined those hands plunging a bayonet *in*. . . .

"And now, they give me you," said Jackie, directing his glare more emphatically upon the face of Mrs. Tredegar. "An award for keeping my life at that cost . . . repeated again and again! . . . Oh, take me away and gild me!"

"And I was so tired of murderers!" she said.

"My Decoration! My Trinket!" said Jackie, laying his hand on hers. "I'm going to wear you."

"Don't do that," said Windsor, pushing the hand off, but quite gently.

"Wear sackcloth and strew the hair with ash," said Mrs. Tredegar. "But swear to our blind souls that it is not true. . . . It is so easy to fool a soul. As it is so easy to kill a lamb."

"Oh, my Trinket!" cried Jackie.

"Don't say that," said Windsor.

"The sluggard spot in our skulls that is dedicated to the imagination is wrapped in cerements of rhinoceros hide," went on Mrs. Tredegar. "How else could we flourish? How else could we be so tripping? . . . Once in a while in a byway of the mind when the moon is blue, a needle of lightning pierces in . . . as just now . . . we vomit, or we fall down on the ground . . . for the dead lamb was visible. Lying low. . . . But see, already the grave closes. . . . Already my palms are laughing, because your head is like a honeycomb between them."

Windsor had been looking away from the others, but at these words he turned quickly. Jackie had taken Helga's hands and was holding them each side his face. Windsor gazed at the ground.

"But the fortunate youth, and fair, got out," resumed Jackie, releasing her hands. "When they made him run a bayonet into the middle of that manikin he fell down; then he went into his barracks and opened an artery in his arm."

Helga gave a sound.

"He made a botch of it, of course. And we've got that hanging arm. Another of us, a boy of this town, got it done. Scientific chap, old Slimmy was. . . . When he was about to finish, he mentioned the bayonet business. 'I told you I couldn't do it,' he said, and croaked. . . . Some of them can't. They just can't, and they have to die. Windy couldn't. . . . He never could stand unpleasantness. If there were two of them, he invariably shied off to the lesser. It seemed less unpleasant to him to cut his artery than to run a sticker into a man's middle."

"Liberal of you to admit that there's something unpleasant about that," said Windsor.

"Oh, I admit it's not my favourite outdoor sport. But the hellish thing with me was that it *could be done*. That's why I'm the ruined man. . . . While you go on smiling in your heaven of incapacity. As for Slimmy, there was quite a bit of talk about his incapacity . . . protests among conscientious objectors and anarchists generally. It was urged that a man who constitutionally can't run a piece of steel into another man's barrel is an invalid. And it was thought irregular to send a sick man forcibly to war."

"How nobly he sits in his incapacity," said Mrs. Tredegar, turning toward Windsor, who was looking rather sick. "He is a lame angel. One wing of his heart is broken. It is trailing on the ground. There is a noble resignation to lameness in his perpetual smiling."

"Do you think so?" said Jackie. "It makes me sick to feel myself getting fond of you." He turned away from Helga with a sulky movement. "It goes against the only thing worth a damn in my life."

"Yes, you must not love any woman but Rosemary, because she is the breath of life, got or un-got. But *you* must have only un-got love."

"Why pitch on me? I'm not made of saint stuff. It's a damned inopportune election. No. I'll use you for balm. . . . But I can't love."

"Well, here's a splendid opportunity for not doing it," said she quaintly. "Embrace it. . . . Besides, it is a rude thing to love, at best."

"I like rude things. It's Windy that should be elected not to love."

"Oh, he's elected, he's elected," said she. "He sits in the seats of the mighty."

"What a divine day," said Windsor, stretching himself more languidly on the grass, "for a sickening conversation."

"Oh, we're sickening, all right," returned Jackie. "Give her to me. She's much more mine than yours. She has a touch of my quality."

"Take her, and be hanged to you both," said Windsor; then repenting, "How beastly we are. See how befuddled her sweet face is."

"It is a fair face," said Jackie, directing his one-eyed glare more glaringly at Mrs. Tredegar, "but she's a goofy one. What could you expect, with a great Dane for a mamma, and a Cymric, Cambrian, Gwalic for a dad. Not to mention a bounding maniac for an uncle-husband. She comes from mouldy places, this girl."

"He was innocent of determined war," said Helga, with a kind of glaze over her eyes, almost closed.

"Who? Your uncle-husband?"

"I never heard of war before," she said. "I need pigeons. . . . Go call back the little villages that are running too far up the flanks of Ætna. . . ."

"What do you mean?" asked Windsor.

"Call back our thoughts from war," she explained.

"How do you know so much about her uncle-husband?" asked Windsor, with curiosity. He had been growing paler during all this talk.

"All I know," said Jackie, "is this girl has been abused."

"Did she tell you so?"

"She! She'll never open her trap except to let out a bunch of flim-flam. She's a fox. Oh, my Fox! My Trinket!"

"I asked you not to say that, Jackie," repeated Windsor.

" 'Why don't you get a lady of your own?
Why don't you let my little gal alone?' "

Jackie trolled a stave from their boyhood.

Windsor got up abruptly, pressing his handkerchief to his mouth, and went away beyond a clump of bushes.

"I got him in the tum," said Jackie. "Damn shame! You started me blabbing, my Trinket. . . . He can't stand nasty things like love and war."

"The little villages have run too far up the flanks of Ætna," she said. "Go to him, you brute!"

Jackie jumped up and began to run. But Windsor now came back into view, his handkerchief still at his mouth. He pocketed it and met the other halfway. Mrs. Tredegar saw Jackie put his arm round his brother, bending his face near, evidently soothing and regretting. The two went on down the field. They had gone quite far, absorbed in each other, before they stopped, turned, and looked back where she was still sitting on the ground.

She got up, then, and followed them.

A charming little cow, the colour of a fawn, was grazing in the field, and in an enclosure beyond, a black bull was crying. They watched him running to and fro, looking for an aperture in the high fence. His face was thrust over with its curled forehead.

"Hyperion's curls," said Mrs. Tredegar, "and the front of Jove. He is purple. His bawl is like the cooing of a thousand doves."

Suddenly the beast retreated backward from the fence, then, gathering velocity, he ran toward it, up-ended and leaped. His ponderous purple bulk hung for an instant in the air, like an eagle, and landed.

There was no sound at the concussion, but two deep holes appeared in the moist earth where his fore hooves had pierced. He shook the clay from them like a dandy pulling off his gloves.

The calm cow had not once lifted her head from the grass during this enormous episode.

Until then the gorgeous eyes of the bull had been fixed only upon her, but now our three friends were aware that their presence in the field had come with a disturbing effect into his consciousness.

He stared, lowered his hyacinthine head from the great full and fruity arch of its neck, and bellowed like the crack of doom.

"Come, let's get out of this," said Jackie. "Damn Charles for that scoundrelly red dress."

Mrs. Tredegar was wearing Charles's gift. The three began to move with alacrity toward the nearest fence, away from the thunder. Then they knew he was coming on, not directly, but in a semicircle, stopping to paw chunks from the ground, up-ending, snorting, revelling, enjoying his rage. He steamed purple. He had not once looked toward the meditative cow since he had sighted the three intruders. He was more in love with war than with love. Now, his purpose concentrated. He touched the ground with his broad gleaming nose, blew the grasses like a whirlwind, and uttering a gigantic and sepulchral moan as if from the caverns of his seventh stomach he charged straight.

"Run for it! Out of this!" Jackie cried. "Here, you shoot ahead with that idiotic dress." He pushed Mrs. Tredegar before him. "Go on, go on. We'll run behind to hide you. Shoot! . . . To the fence. Shoot!"

She ran. But before they reached the fence, Jackie was ahead of her, dragging her by the arm.

They climbed up and over, then looked back for Windsor.

He was where they had left him. He had wrenched up a bush and was whipping the air with its branches.

The bull stood looking at him, considering the whip, his great eyes distended in a glory of amazement.

Mrs. Tredegar leaped down from her perch, ran back a little way, and danced in her red dress.

The animal looked confused, brought forth a profound and troubled sound, and moved obliquely away. Windsor walked thoughtfully toward the others, twirling his branches.

Jackie, who had followed Helga, now returned with them to the fence.

"Windy didn't seem at all frightened," said she.

"Oh, no, Windy's got only moral cowardice," laughed Jackie, in a kind of sob. "He doesn't mind being killed, but he hates like the devil to be bothered. . . . As for me, ever since that affair over there, I've got the funniest disinclination to be gouged."

He pulled his brother up the fence in his arms.

"Why, you weep only out of one eye," said Helga.

CHAPTER XXII ONE LADY FINDS ANOTHER PROSTRATE ON THE FLOOR

"What did you and Jackie do to Mrs. Tredegar in the fields?" asked Giulia.

"What *would* we do to her?"

"Well, you've broken her heart. . . . Or you've bludgeoned into it where it was broken before."

After a little more questioning Windsor told her of Jackie's dissertation.

"But she was perfectly calm," he said, "I was the dog that died."

"Well, you said she was perfectly calm the day you took her fishing."

"I never fish, you know," he interrupted. "I was reading her Francis Thompson on the bank of violets, while Jackie performed the hellish deed. She saw him at it, however, and she was perfectly calm."

"But you remember, afterwards, when you invited her to the feast of fishes in the evening, she said she would come if she could get the hook out of her gullet. And she did not come."

Windsor looked thoughtfully down the terraces toward The

River House. The roofs were scarcely visible in the dusk. The river was a gray scarf lying across the shadows.

"It was a bit thick," he said, "and topped off with the bull. . . . Still, she seemed rather to relish the bull."

"Well, she hasn't been able to get your bayonets out of her gullet. . . . And she's got seven old swords in her heart."

Giulia lowered her eyes to conceal that they were moistening. Windsor lifted her face in his palms and looked.

"And now, you've got a sword in yours, sweetest Giulia," he said.

"Haven't you, sweetest Ariel?"

"I never saw this for anyone's sake before," said he ruminatively, still looking at her welling eyes.

"Listen," she said, gently putting his hands away, "she was lying on the floor . . . all day."

The day after Helga's conversation with Windsor and Jackie in the fields, Giulia had gone down the hill to see Mrs. Tredegar. She had gathered, herself, the serried flowers that she carried, violet, jonquil, tulip, narcissus, pansy, azalea, lily-of-the-valley, hyacinth, anemone.

"She's been lying there on the floor, all day," said Mrs. Johnson in a whisper when Giulia came. "She wouldn't have eat a smitch if Mike hadn't fed her like a calf. Got a pillow under her head by main force. . . . And she's doing it all from flightiness and flummery."

In the room Giulia took a stool and gazed down at what lay on the floor. Mrs. Tredegar was yellowish pale. Her hair, pressed upward and back from her forehead, gave her to the full her Mongolian look. The scar loomed in the middle of her forehead.

"Why not in bed?" asked the visitor.

"The bed has done its worst," said Mrs. Tredegar. She had on her long tattered Chinese garment, with golden dragons, to the feet, which were bare, straight, extravagantly arched, marmoreal.

"There's nothing the matter with me," she said, "only this is one of the days on which I am not quite able to live. It is different from those days when my sails are windy. . . . Then, by God's son, I could sink an Armada with a single oath!"

Giulia was surprised by the moisture of tears she felt in her own unaccustomed eyes. Her heart was, for an instant, full to spilling.

"Then what has got you so down, you rank Elizabethan?" she asked, laying her fingers on a hand which was at once withdrawn.

"Perhaps it was the majesty of the night."

"You keep fit, and you won't notice the majesty of the night," said Giulia.

"Perhaps it was the superabundance of murderers and spilled veins. . . . You understand I would have liked to leave my hand there," Mrs. Tredegar added.

"Where?"

"Under yours."

"But you can't," said Giulia. "Perhaps that is why you're unable to live on certain days, you poor wolf."

"Windy called me that."

"Yes, I know."

"You know everything he does," said Helga. "What abundance!"

("What starvation!" thought Giulia.) "Didn't you sleep at all?"

"I had iron eyelids. . . . It is strong with night, the power for sorrow that has slackened in the day. . . . The body, the slayer, lies harmless. . . . The soul is alone with its slaughter. . . . The slow wheel. Arcturus defines his arc. Then at last, oh, at long last, the insecure gray begins . . . or no, not yet . . . A cock. Then the ruffling, the hurry-up, the jokes among the leaves. . . . Something has been happening in the bed. . . . The cat that sleeps at the foot is awake. The little brave head, still a shadow, is lifted toward the window . . . the sweet, the peakèd ears . . . He is quiet as death . . . How long has he been awake . . . listening . . . cruel and full of death . . . listening for the first awaking bird?"

Giulia had nothing to say as she sat looking at Mrs. Tredegar's pale face on the pillow with its long eyes almost closed. She would have liked to touch the long undulation of lion-coloured hair that lay on either side of her friend's breast, raying out along the floor. The cropped head could hardly believe that such mass was really there.

"One honeyed bird has plunged his beak into his brother's throat," Mrs. Tredegar resumed. "But the sweetest soul of man would rather open his own vein."

"You know about Windsor," said Giulia. "He never told you. Who did?"

"Before, I would have said, let us all practise parthenogenesis, for conjugal love has been betrayed," said Helga. "But now, I say let there be no births at all, for all men are murderers, and all mothers have bloody hearts. They set their sons upon each other. . . . I'll go pray. I'll get me to my mountain. They have all killed my father. I'll go pray."

"I can't bear any more of this, I think," said Giulia.

"We can bear more," returned the other. Really, it seemed to Giulia that she was asleep, that Mrs. Tredegar was talking out of a deep sleep. She took in the mysterious face, the slightly exaggerated cheek bones, the eyebrows lifted at the outer corners: a Scandinavian mask very cautiously suggestive of Mongolian.

"Bend thitherwards," said Helga. "No. You can take your stars away, they will not light this place."

"Helga!" cried Giulia, using that name for the first time. "You know I can't bear this. I'm shivering."

"We are mortally sick, sweet friend," replied Mrs. Tredegar. "And he . . . I praise you, my black wanderer. You made a hot killing . . . you are not of the regiments that kill cold. . . . I praise you, *quia non infernus confitébitur tibi, neque mors laudábit te.*"

"What on earth are you saying?" exclaimed Giulia. "Is it from the Office for the Dead? Is it, 'Hell doth not praise thee, neither shall death praise thee'? My poor Latin! Whom are you speaking to? . . . Helga?"

"You are an arranger of flowers," said Mrs. Tredegar, half sitting up, with languor, as if she were just awakened, and staring at the mass of blossoms Giulia had put in a vase and set on the floor beside her.

"You are that being of singular excellence, an arranger of flowers." She turned the vase round. "I am confused with bouquets . . . when I find at the other side which is always toward the wall, the faces of other exorbitant flowers. . . . As if a canvas should be painted on both sides. It is overwhelming as Janus. . . . In spite of the beauty of the nape, of the pelt, there should be some degree of relief from beauty when the face is turned away. . . . This is a quiet hyacinth place, all in flower. There should be peace here, by all accounts. . . . Come hither, all ye forsakers of husbands!"

"Helga, do you know I can't stand your look of sorrow," said Giulia.

"Sorrow! I have no sorrow. That would be too human!"

"Oh, my sweet!"

"There was never any woman friend before," said Mrs. Tredegar suddenly. "And she has a cosmopolitan acquaintance with grief, the veritable *sorgen*. May I take you in my arms? . . . Heave to, I should like to know once before I go how a woman feels. . . . Ah, the very way she looks. . . . And what a way! . . . Soft to the touch! And does the captive Rosemary feel like this? *Dolce, dolce!* Men have a fine time of it!"

For a moment, Giulia leaned down to Helga's embrace, before she was let loose.

"Why do you say 'before I go'? Are you going away?" she asked.

"You have bought me no grave here," was the reply.

"I will buy you a grave, my love," said Giulia. The two women looked at each other, then lowered their eyes to hide the gifts they made.

"My brother bought me a deep one in the full sun of a coral island," said Helga. "So you will have to come back, he cried . . . but *he* cannot buy me with a bed."

"You mean your husband?" asked Giulia, curiosity gleaming through her tenderness.

"Come, come," said Helga, "we must hold out, you and I. We've got so many dead lambs to carry. . . . And we mustn't be angry. We mustn't get our monkeys up. . . . But people in our pickle can't afford yellow livers. . . . You especially, because *you* can lose your head."

"Oh, my dear!" exclaimed Giulia, "you haven't lost *yours*, have you? . . . Don't leave me!"

"I went to my uncle's grave last night," the other brought out in a curious tone, "after Jackie and Windy had died into the sun, and I said, 'What did *you* know about it all, old Twinkletoes? Can nothing get a laugh out of you?' "

"Helga!"

"Then the night . . . and in the morning, we bathe and clothe the body, that obsequious beast, and return his dagger into his hand."

"Helga!" repeated Giulia, "you've got to come to my rescue!"

Mrs. Tredegar pressed her hands against her eyes like a person abolishing a savage dream, then gave a quivering sigh and turned to her friend her usual look, lucid, in bounds, humane.

"Will you let me lift you up?" asked Giulia.

"Yes, but I must go very carefully . . . steady hand on the wheel . . . bad sea . . . soft, soft does it . . . inveterate pussyfoot . . . all hands take in sail . . . I'm afraid."

CHAPTER XXIII AN INDISCREET PEEP AT FOUR PEOPLE IN THEIR BEDS, ONE WRITING CURIOUS LETTERS

WINDSOR was asleep in his bedroom that had been violated by Helga. Or perhaps he was beginning to make the gradual dim ascent through fathoms of fluid unconsciousness, or more than consciousness, in which he seemed to have been floating.

Slowly out of the transitory death that had involved him, like the penetration of vague light through liquid fathoms, came to him without sight or sound the unproven sense that he lived.

He lived, but without organism, strength, or intention . . . and yet, now, not entirely without form . . . slowly he proceeded upward without identity or volition, but not entirely without form. . . . It was a sort of form, perhaps at first, of something far more formless than a sea spectre, that took on reaching.

He was involved in a shape that took on the function of expanding, opening, and reaching. It might have been at last, like a sea anemone without a stem, drinking its way through the translucent darkness.

It opened and closed its centre. It felt its way, extending, continually elongating its filaments, continually reaching and recoiling and reaching. Feeling, reaching, with fluctuant expansion, it now gathered itself into compacter substance.

It mounted, with more defined intention. It felt the presence beyond it or above it, the shadow, in the ever more pellucid fluid, of its object. . . . It rose through an ever thinning element. It felt an increasing release from pressure. It gathered itself, it yawned, all its substance opened wide, unfurled still greater powers of reaching. . . . It clasped and closed upon—and sucked in—Helga.

The windows of Windsor's room looked toward the river. Those of Jackie's faced the town, commanding the little house next the church, where lived the family of the Reverend George.

Jackie was still asleep and breathing rather hard. His face was flushed, for there had been potations in the night, and his hair, the "bang," thinning on the temples, curled moistly. His eyes were equal in sleep. There was a pathos about his sleep, something helpless and abandoned, not in full repose. His arm was curled round a ragged doll, a derelict from Rosemary's childhood, which was always his bed companion.

In the little house beside the church, Rosemary was lying between two babies, for the Littlest Johnny had come from his crib for comfort in the night. She was awake, but she could not move for fear of waking the little ones. She closed her eyes again, the long lashes falling like prostrate reeds down her pale cheeks. Love was welling out of her for her husband whom she could hear making the fire in the kitchen. The beauty of his patience, his submission to their daily tasks, was almost insupportable.

Her thought, with habitual anxiety, crossed the valley toward the house where Jackie was sleeping. She wondered if there were many women who loved two men at once. . . . But this, this in the little house was the saturated, the married love. Her breast could hardly contain it. . . .

Suddenly, a look of distress passed across her quiet face. She had remembered that it gave George pain to think that the nursing of babies was no longer a very private matter with Rosemary, his Mystical Rose, as he used to call her. He had wished that Mrs. Tredegar had not been present at this function.

He struggled against the impression that Rosemary latterly even *looked* less refined. There had been such ineffable delicacy in her appearance before. The exquisite gesture of hastily covering her breast when she nursed the first baby . . . that thrilling mystery! . . . And now, she didn't bother. . . . All the children, any woman guest, could be present at that white and rosy function, quite disclosed.

"A mother has to be so tough," she had said. "A mother can't expect to have as nice feelings as a gentleman."

"I should have thought they would grow more and more refined," the Reverend George brought forth, and she had replied, laughing:

"How on earth could you think *that!*"

Sometimes it would seem, so much against his will, that Rosemary had . . . deteriorated. In the beginning how divine had been that vision . . . of the two serving God side by side, almost like shapes of the disembodied, she a slim ardent seraph, clothed with white samite, the Tower of Ivory, the Mystical Rose.

Now, she had grown almost material. She was always panting, breathless, between babies. And she thought so much about the children's merely physical life. She herself with her children appeared involved almost completely in the life of the body.

He was sometimes gravely troubled for her fidelity to the Church. She had not communicated for a long period, though she had not been either with child or in a state of nursing quite *all* the time.

She had such a pile of books on biological and medical subjects. She would read these while she nursed the baby, and it rather took away from the beauty of the picture. He would have preferred some spiritual, or at least poetic, work resting against the cuddled baby in her lap. She used to have such a fine taste in poetry.

He had spoken to her upon certain matters of faith, and her reply had been disquieting.

"Women have to get so terribly scientific, you know."

A bad slip, thought Rosemary. But it had been a worse slip when she told him that Mrs. Tredegar had asked for a sip—no, not asked, but said that she wished she could have a sip.

That amazing woman had got into the crib with the Old Baby. She said she wanted to see how it felt. And Rosemary had been sitting beside it nursing the new baby, when Mrs. Tredegar said, "I think what my horny heart needs is a drop of mother's milk."

It had not gone any farther, but that was far enough for the Reverend George. He did not try to conceal his horror. He had rather liked that frightful woman, "but if she's going about doing things like this! . . ."

"There can't be many things like this to do, can there?" Rosemary had made another slip. She laughed when she said it.

And then George had uttered the first unkind thing he had ever said to Rosemary. There was to be only one more, for she did not live long after that.

"Perhaps when you have stopped having babies you will resume your faith and your delicacy—if you ever stop!"

Rosemary, lying between the two infants this morning, suddenly opened her fringed eyes. She had a merry mind, and she was a philosopher, but when she recalled this episode she was frightened. She always chased it as fast as she could from her memory, feeling his repentant head in her lap when he had, the next instant, gone on his knees in wild remorse.

Rosemary told Giulia what Mrs. Tredegar had said (not what George had said, oh, no!) that about what her horny heart needed, and asked Giulia if she was horrified. That lady did not seem to be. In fact, she laughed. But when she, in turn, told it to Windsor, that gentleman found it sickening. So Rosemary, on hearing of this effect upon him, felt herself justified in her belief that the experiences of women made them less refined than men, that, as Mrs. Tredegar had said, women were bulls in men's china shops.

While Rosemary, bulwarked with babies, was going over these matters in her mind, Windsor, finishing the dream in which some element of himself clasped Helga, leaped out of bed. He was trembling slightly with revulsion. Everything that Mrs. Tredegar was and did seemed an offence. He turned from the idea of her as he turned from incivility, intrusion and disorder.

At that moment Helga was sitting in her bed and writing a letter on her knee:

> Again Love's halberd beating on the door. I suppose this is at last the proper madness. His words run up and down me like a blush.
>
> It has very little kinship with whatever passion we have known together, O my Black Wanderer.
>
> There, in the shadow of great darkness, in the full face of ferocious terror and evil, we could always speak freely to each other. I being in relation to your adult horrors manifestly young, an inquirer in hell, a parvenu fiend. In the infernal glow there was no occasion for secrecies. We had the candour of fiends. Here, with him in the clear light of young summer fields of afternoon, in the frolic of things, I am careful. . . . I am careful of innocence. I am not careful of the damned. I am careful of elves. You will be saying, who is this elfin King, this Ariel?
>
> *Quis est iste Rex glóriæ?*[1]
>
> His name is Windsor, but called rightfully, Windy. I feel that he and his wife are very slightly married. That is, not what *we* would call married. . . . But it must be difficult for people who are outside the pale of consanguinity to be completely married. Of course, it is best when they are brothers like Siegmund and Sieglinda. . . . Would that Windy had been rocked in the same cradle with me and laughed on the same breast, the good milk dripping from his mouth like a calf.
>
> I feel like a Negro, or a Latin country, when I see him coming. . . . Latin countries have continued to be cheerful over matters that no Protestant country would be in the slightest degree cheerful about. . . . And there were Negroes laughing and singing as I came here. One little crepuscular girl, dancing or trampling like a centaur, said, "I'se a-feelin' loose this evenin'."
>
> Someone told me that in the Southern part of this land these delectable creatures are not permitted in the trams used by Caucasians. That is as it should be, for we would sadden them: but it appears that the vehicles reserved for them, called "Jim Crow cars," are dingy, with rough seats, etc. These, of course, should be of barbaric splendour. . . . I am sure you will take delight like a good husband to know that my Ethiopian heart is feeling

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[1] Who is this King of Glory?

loose, and drums and tramples at the footstep of a man. I used to tremble at these things when I was a cub, but now I have thickened like a lion in full manhood. *A porta ínferi erue Dómine, ánimam meam.*[1] I do not neglect to say the Office for the slain lamb and you and all the drumless dead. But I wish I knew where you were so I might compute the hour and be saying it with you as hitherto. Smile toward me through your veil, oh, you, that wandering king who masked his masks with triple veils of tears. I do not see, nor wish any marriage, or love-solution in this affair. My love for this man rests like a child hummingbird in midair without hope . . . and will be as if a child had died in the air. I am, my dear Fiend, your orphan-daughter and your widowed wife—Helga.

Mrs. Tredegar took another sheet and wrote:

Veni, Beata Eleanor,[2] sweet sister. *Dignáre me laudáre te, Virgo sacráta.*[3] I will praise you for virginity and saintship, also for that you have dark eyes. . . .

But do not tell me that when you put flowers on the altar you are careful not to be pleased for their sakes, but only for His . . . and that you pray against the temptation to smell a flower, for it starves me with cold. . . .

Is it not enough that your honied cheek will never know a kiss and that your antique costume of ferocious wool does not permit you pantalettes?

I mentioned that Llewelyn in his sacred and most loving providence had equipped me and my dear husband with cats. The golden one, named Blinko or Little Owen, has been inhabiting my lap. He has seven sacerdotal toes on each hand instead of the usual number. And I think he has put out this little flurry of toes the better to embrace you, my dear. When he inhabits my lap (or "nook" as a Madonna of this town calls it) I stream with honey from throat to knee. I had not realized before this occupation of the territory of my person that the body of a woman is a cradle.

You, of course, have been retrieved from this lamentable ignorance by your intimacy with the Blessed Virgin.

I conclude that plain cats are better than Persians, Angoras, or what-not, which are beautiful, but after the manner of muffs or tippets. I should say the æsthetic pleasure is infinitely more intense in the contemplation of this clear anatomy, unobscured by flounces, frills, ruffles, feathers, fronds, wavings, rodomontade, and furbelows of fur. Here we have the clean vigour of a shape designed in angles, but relenting into curve . . . rondure that retains the integrity of angle. . . .

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[1] From the door of hell, Lord, deliver my soul.

[2] Come, blessed Eleanor.

[3] Permit me to praise thee, sacred Virgin.

I understand that Blinko was dedicated to chastity in his childhood. He is a saint, innocent of love and murder. His grandfather, Little David turned monk later, like Abelard (to save his sacred ears from nightly fray), but he adorns sanctity as to the manner born. His gravity is his transcendent charm. He goes round ankles singing rather low, but does not believe in laps. Blinko, on the other hand, is Harlequin and a lover.

His golden vestment pales to fawn as it nears his stomach. His breeks are a miracle of gold, paling inward. The action of his going is unparalleled for grace; his tail, unimpeachably perpendicular, leaves the room like a pageant. He has the advantage of this royal appendage over a man who, especially in a short coat, adds nothing to himself in going, his rear being without panache.

You will say that all this intimacy with cats is worse than intimacy with a flower, but you will be pleased to know that I have no dealings with Blinko. It is he that has dealings with me. I do not know how to pet him. I do not lay a marauder's hand on his gold. It is he that handles this love traffic, "making bread" on my breast with song. He keeps his daggers in his mittens, caressing my throat with caution as the look of Orpheus touched Eurydice in that final moment.

The cat is a repentant owl. His song of a kind kettle makes amends to the heart broken by owls. . . . So he caresses me craftily, swords in scabbard. In this love craft he is superior to babies.

I notice for the first time that females are not favourites of Nature, although they are frequently bedecked as if to be her darlings. That is all in the way of utility, however. I discover that a setting hen is put to the torture so that a fever may be induced for the benefit of eggs. . . . Her great anxiety and anguish are visible in indeterminate pecking and a raving eye which is denied the benefit of tears.

Women are reduced to receptacles, and it is remarkable that nothing is thought of it. . . . The person of a tall woman is the chair, cradle, bed, chariot, and pavement of children. She is a trodden field.

Drained pale . . . yet such is her constitution that Gargantua is a penny whistle to her bovine laughter. Meanwhile her

> ruthless violators lift up the translucent eyes of Jesus, and her own return the Look . . . which quickly breaks from the mortal sadness of the sublime into palatial merriment.
>
> The hen, on the other hand, has no humour. As her feverish eyes are unappeased by tears, so is her beak sterile of laughter, even for the bravery of chicks. Cows, dogs, and sheep remain grave in viewing their waggish offspring. They bandy no quips with cubs.
>
> The cat, however, though her divine face is branded like a woman's with maternity, will rise to the dignity of joking and gymnastic with her rogues.
>
> The supreme woman of this town is a trodden field. She is called after Mary by the rose-name of that great Lady.
>
> There is another female here with a beautiful eagled nose called Giulia. . . . Her heart is dead. She has laced a cadaver into armour. . . . There is a pulse for me. But I am not afraid. I am habituated to the pulsing of the dead.
>
> I ask you to pray with the greatest industry for the King of the elves. I don't know if it has been the practice of the Church to pray for the gauzy welfare of these creatures, but I think it should be done. Each day, when we have finished the Office for the Dead, let us pray for elves. They should be especially commended to the care of the Blessed Virgin, the Titania of Heaven. And to Saint Bartholomew, who having been flayed, carries his jaunty skin like an old jacket tossed over his arm.
>
> *Inviolata, íntegra et casta es,*[1] O my sister, my Dove, *ora pro nobis.*[2]

Having finished her letter to her sister, Mrs. Tredegar got out of bed and knelt beside it for a long time. She murmured Latin words, which, if they had fallen upon a more erudite ear than Mrs. Johnson's (just then attentive outside the door) would have proven to be from the Office for the Dead.

When she had finished, she remained some time not apparently in prayer but still upon her knees. At last, she said, "Have you got done, my Dove? . . . You too, my Wanderer?"

Then she got up and went about her toilette with what Mrs. Johnson would have considered unwomanly brusqueness, could her sight have penetrated the oak as well as her hearing.

---

[1] Inviolate, honourable and chaste thou art.

[2] Pray for us.

Presently Mrs. Tredegar took from a bundle in her trunk a silk dress designed for evening wear. As Charles Crawford had purchased it for her when he brought her from her ship, it was red. She contemplated it with knit brows. For that evening she was going to spend with Giulia, who was entertaining the Signora Carmela Ferraro, a singer of opera, and Windsor would, of course, be there.

Mrs. Tredegar was not sure that Ariel was any more pleased than a bull with redness. For herself, she rather liked it, and in any case, Charles was to be thought of, so kind and a tavern for Titans, yet with no friend willing to wear his favourite hue.

"Hue and cry," said Mrs. Tredegar to herself, still with a slight trouble in her eyebrows. From another bundle she took out an old long Florentine chain.

CHAPTER XXIV IN WHICH A FAMOUS SOPRANO GIVES TONGUE, AND A GENTLEMAN GIVES A LADY AN EXTRAORDINARY LOOK

IT WAS Friday and late afternoon. Windsor and Giulia were standing at the window of her sitting room. The Signora Ferraro had arrived. Charles and Giulietta had driven her down from Boston. She was now in a state of elaborate repose, tremendously large and blond, deposited in the elaborate state bed. Giulietta was out with the legs playing tennis. Charles was planning beautiful drinks for the evening and viewing the charming preparations, the abundant flowers in the rooms, the holiday aspect of things. Fabio, the accompanist and latest husband of the Signora, a young Latin with extraordinary eyes, who spoke English like a song, was trying the piano. The piano had given a leap at his touch and shook its flanks with joy at the unusual encounter with a master. It seemed to clarion out, "It is thou, it is thou!"

Windsor, who had been helping to arrange the flowers, was lazily contemplating going home to dress. He stood in the window with his friend, wearing his look of pained content with a difference.

The dream of the seizure of Helga with which he had awakened had stayed with him like an annoying flavour all day long.

"I wish you didn't have to have Mrs. Tredegar," he said.

"Oh, but I have to have," said Giulia, "and I particularly want to have to have."

"You *are* in love with her, you know," he said.

"Aren't you?"

He made an impatient sound, and immediately after stiffened slightly with attention.

"There she is now!"

Mrs. Tredegar was coming up the slope beyond the terrace, moving not with her wolfish crouch of the shoulders but erect, defining her front in the manner which the Reverend George had thought unnecessary.

"Isn't there a touching nobility in her movement?" said Giulia—"like a lion let out, and finding he has scope for his action." Windsor did not answer.

"I'm rather like you," she continued, "in not liking to be moved. . . . I'm afraid I'll have to receive her in my arms."

"Restrain yourself," said he. "We mustn't take superior beauty out of the eye into the arms."

"Oh, you admit the beauty?"

"Of a rude sort," he returned, not taking his gaze away from the advancing woman.

"I shouldn't have done it really," said she. "Helga isn't a wieldy subject for embraces. Nevertheless, I am more violent than you."

"You're as violent as a pearl," said he, not seeing her sidelong look which glowed momentarily with consciousness of the possibilities of her nature almost like a menace. "So you call her Helga, now."

Mrs. Tredegar came on with determination. But when she was halfway up the terrace she stopped. For the first time her eyes had settled on the window and the two standing in it side by side. She now looked steadily at them; then, with an ambiguous wave of the hand, slanted off and went back the way she had come.

"What does she mean by that?" exclaimed Giulia. "She was coming, wasn't she?"

"Oh, she was coming."

"Shall we whine out like disappointed hounds?" she asked.

"No, no, let her go. Let's not bay her back." They both let out their breaths audibly.

"She's always doing unjustifiable things," said he, in an offended tone. "It's one way of making one's self too important."

"But she doesn't do them for that," said Giulia meditatively.

"Oh, no," said he, turning away. "She does them because she's barbarous."

That evening, when Mrs. Tredegar appeared in her red dress, Charles bent over her and whispered remorsefully, "You're sure you don't mind?"

"Oh, I feel like a banner!" said she. "I'm in full sail, I turn loose wonder and Fate upon the town."

She sent her narrow gaze at once round the circle of the room for Windsor. He was talking to the Signora. Giulia led Helga to the spreading façade of that portentous lady.

"You also are not fat," said the singer, examining the red façade of Mrs. Tredegar, where the Florentine chain hung, defining her well presented breast, "though extraordinarly you have *a petto, une poitrine,* a chist. . . . Ah, this fatness!" She indicated her own stupendous person and then turned her examining dark eye upon that of Giulia. "*Che disgrazia!*[1] It is a pity that you also must."

"Why should I?" said Giulia. "I'm not a blond."

"*Dio mio,* you would call me not one if you have seen these *jadis.*" She shook her golden ringlets. "*Nero, nero,* black. . . . It is the embonpoint which gives the beautiful fat voice. . . . But it is not so good for the scene."

Helga suggested gymnastics, going rather inopportunely to the length of stretching her arms toward the ceiling before putting her hands to the ground. Windsor stared at her. As she bent down the Florentine chain rattled on the floor.

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[1] How unfortunate!

"Ah, that does me nothing!" sighed the Signora.

"Why not stop eating?" inquired Charles. "Doesn't that do you something?"

"Certainly, yes. But it is to die of sorrow."

"Have you had anything to do with marriage?" asked Mrs. Tredegar with kindly curiosity.

"Many," replied the Signora, lifting her eyes to heaven with a great sigh as if she spoke of maladies. "And now my Fabio. My sister also is wife and has quite long children already."

Presently this mountain, to the roulades of her accompanist, delivered herself of a golden mouse. The voice which emerged from her great stomach lived like a ray of light in upper air, thin and high and pure as that of a cricket. Its dexterity was a juggler's. Its power of piercing scorched along the nerves and troubled the heart with indefinable longing.

She had come late into her reign. She was a love-woman who had wasted her youth, refusing impresarios, to follow her beloved tenors in obscure companies. This phenomenon of sound had been spilled in provincial places until a recent husband with a practical turn had brought the rare bird to astound the metropolis a little while before the end. He had been succeeded by Fabio.

Windsor grew quite pale under the crystal stress, but his face was calm. Helga's, however, quivered as if under the lash. She had never heard a "coloratura" soprano before in the confines of a drawing room.

"You are a *saint indifferent,*" she said to Windsor. "You are holy because you do not love. You do not love, that is what I like so much about you."

The singer began again, and without answering, Windsor turned away. Standing against the wall, he glanced at Giulia and Helga, sitting side by side. The former looked like a white female eagle that had taken to æsthetics, made her nest with subtler craft, and looked a little coldly on her wobbly offspring. The carving of her nostril was fine as the arch of a shell. Beside it Helga's nostril was a very simple affair. Her short straight strong nose he described as Doric. Contrasted with Giulia's, her face seemed flat as a mask. Beside the cropped head of dark brown, her tawny braided mat looked cumbrous. Her eyebrows of the same light colour as her hair lifted at the outer ends, a little ragged, like a windy feather. The thin perfect black line of Giulia's descended from the middle with an expression of discontent. Her small chin fell away a little from the poignant projection of her aquiline nose. Her neck was white and frail. Helga's was tawny and vigorous.

The hands of both women were without repose. The delicate fingers of Giulia played ceaselessly with her scarf or her pearls. The powerful hands of Helga were rather clenched on the arms of her chair, as if she were about to rise. There was difference marked and arresting in the design of their breasts, waists, thighs, knees, calves, feet.

When the Signora had finished singing, she declined refreshment, looking wistfully at the charming viands that were being proffered by the Japanese, a charming spectacle in his brocaded dress. She threw herself into a chair, panting and deploring that she should be conducted to bed very shortly, as she must conserve what beauty and voice she had for her purpose. Her ageless face above the wealth of her pearly throat seemed to cast off darts of rosy light, baffling the eye that might examine it. Helga gazed at her, dazzled. Giulietta remarked that the pretty little eldest daughter of Mrs. Worthington was looking very "brisk" to-night.

"No," said Helga, still at gaze, "I like them wild and old!"

The Signora's purpose, she confided to the company, was to leave behind her a sufficient fortune so that the young musician, her accompanist and most recent husband, should be free to pursue the noblest and most erudite ways of music without any interruption of necessity.

"Fabio shall be one pure," she said, "for music only living. . . . *Mai, mai,* never he shall play one thing of the half-good —*mail* for please the *ignoranti.* Never for the money. . . . *Per Bacco!* One alone shall live the life of *sogno,* of dream . . . to compose, to play like happy master . . . when I am dead."

She was interrupted and all her listeners amazed by a cry from

Fabio, who leaped from the piano, where he had been making a low murmuring incantation. He threw himself on his knees at the singer's feet, encircled her majestic waist with his arms, and burying his face in her deep breast wept as if his heart had burst.

"*Regina della mia anima!*"[1] he sobbed. "If you are dead, I die!"

"*Macche!* But I am an old," she murmured, pressing his head against her, the dark thickly undulating hair mingling with her pearls, laces, and decorations.

"*Senza te* . . . without you there is no music!" he wept.

"*Dio mio!*" cried the Signora desperately. "The young mens are dead that loves old womens!"

"*Solamente*—only the olds are noble!" he cried.

The shaken artists were led away to their quarters in the farthest wing of the house, and the friends resumed their disturbed composure.

Rosemary was at the crestfallen piano, and people were dancing. Windsor went out on the porch that looked toward the river, where Mrs. Tredegar was standing.

"What makes you so cocksure I can't love?" he asked.

He took her by the Florentine chain and led her out on the terrace, past the penetration of the lights. In the copse not far away the owl took up his sorrowing, and Mrs. Tredegar uttered the Danish word for sorrow, "*sorgen.*" Still holding her by the chain, he looked into her face, drawing her nearer to him by the tether round her neck. There was light enough for her to see what was taking place in him. He closed his eyes for a moment and his features settled into an abstracted difference, until they were like those of a man asleep and in the act of dreaming a secret and ravishing dream. His lips clenched as if to prevent his breath from becoming an audible sob. Then slowly his eyes opened and concentrated on her mouth . . . centred so hard, with such stealth, but with such iron, such determined desperate thievery that they lost focus, converged together. "It is the Look," thought Helga.

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[1] Queen of my soul.

She watched this phenomenon as if she were fascinated by a serpent. Her face was being drawn nearer to the opposed face by his hands on her chain.

"Now what *is* this?" she said at last, almost whispering.

"Call it love," he returned also under his breath, and unable to recover his eyes from this hard, crossed gaze which had been like the stare of a rigid cat so near to a sleeping mouse that its sight begins to be confused.

"*Gud forbarme sig!*" she exclaimed in Danish. "That would be too horrible."

"What do you mean?"

"If you love me I'm done for," she returned.

"Why?" he asked.

"Because if you love me you're as good as dead."

They were interrupted by a sound on the porch. A man's figure was retreating from one of the windows where evidently he had been looking in.

He leaped down from the porch and came almost running straight toward them. It was Jackie.

"Here, here," he said. "You're stealing my trinket."

A woman now stepped out of the window where she had been gathering her scarf around her and followed him across the grass. The face resolved itself into that of Rosemary.

With a throaty sound Jackie disappeared into the copse.

"Was that Jackie?" asked Rosemary, in an agitated voice. "Why didn't Giulia ask him? . . . Poor boy, I believe he's been listening to the music all the time outside. Suddenly there was his face, there at the window. . . ."

Neither Helga nor Windsor was able to answer. The three went in silence toward the house.

CHAPTER XXV TWO IN A TAVERN

JACKIE went down the terrace to where he had left his car.

He drove away rattling into the darkness, and encountering Michael, the valet, in the road he picked him up, as he had done many times before.

They alighted at a remote house where a mechanical piano was flooding the Negro night with syncopated waves of betrayed negroism.

Much later, they were still sitting at a table in the lighted room. Michael drinking discreetly, mathematically, as becomes a good regular drinker. There was no haste, no fluster about his operation. There was science. As he listened to the expansions of his host, he thoughtfully observed the exact operation of his process; the gentle lifting of the spirits, the subsidence of his sorrows. At a certain point he uttered a long "Ah," the silky sigh that lets out care: the sigh that says, "I've got it."

At another point he remembered Wicklow. Here he entered into a state of mind. An old song, heavy as a honeysuckle with sweet, went through his head:

"Girl of the winning tongue,
Flower of all our maidens young,
Eileen Aroon."

The principal pursuit of Jackie's existence also was a kind of wild science. It was a desperate but highly intellectual inquiry into the problem of just what his stomach and nerves would do next under the heroic application of alcohol. His powers had been impaired by his sufferings in the war.

He felt that life would be far simpler if the gullet were more leathery and the interior of man constructed of more resistant material.

Four hardy youngsters of the town were dancing among some passers-by whose touring car was standing magnificent without, a snorter, a devourer of roads. Joe Belmont, once Giuseppe Belmonte, who kept the place, now recently returned from a sojourn in prison for bootlegging, was smiling at his guests with sweetness and apprehension, tender and on tenterhooks. He hoped that they would drink a great deal of what he had, but he hoped less hopefully that they would not get "too funny."

Jackie drank and watched the dancers, his one eye glaring. The scar across his temple and cheek bone burned red. Michael watched him with a faint comfortable smile. He always expanded into peculiar comfort with this democratic young gentleman, the only one of the ilk with whom he had ever sat at table.

"Say what you like," resumed Jackie, "say what you like, my worthy Mike. . . . Here, write this down. I can't see very well, poor cock-eyed calender that I am! A poet of sorts in his own home town. One can muddle along very well on a few lean adjectives. Say what you like. . . . Here's a pencil. Take the damned menu. . . .

"Drink! The bubbles wink
Their little eyes
With a mild surprise
At finding me so wise. . . .

Wait a minute. . . . Go on:

"Stay one with me.
Let it be
One that was a lover . . .

That's you, my worthy Mike. . . .

"Here let us lie,
Here let us recover
The flower of some forgotten eye
And diddle, doodle, doddle die!

You don't happen to have a rhyme in your pocket for eyelashes?"

He mused. Michael motioned to the waiter. He felt it behooved him now to take his turn at paying.

"Draw up your stool," he intoned, adding in his succulent brogue, "One more bottle, and have at the sublime."

"Who said that?" inquired Jackie, offended at the intrusion of a good thing not his own.

"A fellow called Rab the Ranter. He done it in taverns, like yourself, sir. . . . Only he was no sort of a fella compared with the likes of Tommy Moore."

Jackie dismissed the two intruders with a wave of his hand. He brushed them off the tablecloth.

"Anyway, they're both dead dogs," said Michael, withdrawing them apologetically.

"Those dead and dumb that will not live," pursued Jackie. "It's mere inertia. . . . Here, write this:

"And now,
The very Thou . . .
If I could catch thee
In I would latch thee. . . ."

Michael wrote and waited respectfully for more. But that vein seemed to have run out.

"The trouble is I'm blasted. . . . Listen," Jackie almost whispered in Michael's ear, peering at him closely with one eye wild and the other perfectly calm. "You're a Gael. You're full of words—to the point of popping. Have you ever heard of a rhyme for Rosemary?"

He waited anxiously until after some cudgeling the other produced reluctantly:

"Who knows Mary? . . . So goes Mary . . . Rosemary . . .

Woe's Mary . . . No, no, them rhymes ain't for the likes of her, the sweet!"

"The sweet! A cheat, a cheat!" cried Jackie. "Who's cheated here? It's Jackeye, Jackeye got the black eye! . . ." He concluded, "No, those are bum rhymes. Ask the Irish for jigs and they give you a keen . . . no, she has no rhyme and she must die. . . . They're killing her among 'em every day. 'Oh, but life goes gaily, gaily in the house where she dies daily.' "

He was silent awhile. The dancers fed the mechanical piano with quarters, and it, taking the things that are Cæsar's, responded with imperial integrity. After a moment or two, Jackie again gave Michael the command to exercise his pencil.

"What made me drunk to-night?
Was it that you left your cloak
Lying there as gray as smoke
In my hut so gray and lonely?
Or was it only
That stuff of Tuscany?
Drunk in the dusk, any
Man might know it
Would make a poet. . . .

I doubt whether we were intended to go after each other with all this predatory love. . . . You see what becomes of it . . . martyrs. I'm not the guilty one . . . because I didn't get the chance." Jackie laughed wildly. "I was cheated of my guilt. . . . I'm done with the folly of sleep. Give me a skinful. . . . I burst with unappeasable thirst. . . . Oh, the attraction of liquefaction. . . ."

Jackie tipped his chair back on its hind legs and leaned his head out of the open window, his flushed face listed to the stellar armies which were up and marching.

"Jewelled eyes of toads in the black pool," he said. At the moment it did not matter to him that he had not named precisely the fellows his fancy was after.

"Frogs, ye mean," suggested Michael modestly.

"Why frogs? There's no decent rhyme for frogs. . . . Perhaps you'd like to offer a rhyme for 'batrachian.' "

"Gracian," said Michael, feeling like a guest of Alcibiades, with ivy and violets in his hair.

"Here, write this," ordered Jackie, bringing the forelegs of his chair down with a thump:

"I straddle stars, those heavenly toads,
With that rude straddle of old Rhodes.
Old dog Tray sits up and begs,
And Pleiads run between my legs. . . .

I meant the dog star by 'old dog Tray.' Get me? You aren't like the usual layman, slow as turtles in the uptake."

Jackie clapped Michael inaccurately on the back of his chair instead of upon his own more yielding rear. He wrung his bruised hand.

"The Irish are worse than alligators for tough backs," he remarked with the air of a naturalist. . . .

"Come, bottoms up, and fill the void,
You grim old grandpa anthropoid! . . .

I don't ask you if you could cough up a rhyme for Helga. You can't get blood from a stone."

"She's beautiful as the white women of the Shee that have green blood," said Michael, "but it's killed she is by them dragons of Welshmen."

"She was up at our house on the hill looking for Windy," said Jackie, "and I said, 'You have a pair of aces,' meaning eyes. 'Can you see Rosemary in her garden?' And, by God, she could see all the way across. . . . And Rosemary was blindfold, with the kids all over her like a pack of pups."

Michael obliged with a stave:

"Come with the love of old
True as the tested gold,
Pet lamb of all the fold,
Eileen Aroon!"

"Celibacy's my forte," remarked Jackie:

"Me who drank
Down melancholy, like a tank."

Then he went definitely, though waveringly, toward the door, while he roared out:

"Where's that piper? I want to pay, pay, pay, pay, pay!"

CHAPTER XXVI ENTER A STRANGER. HE DISTURBS THE HERO IN A MOST AMAZING FASHION

WINDSOR and his brother, Jackie, had inherited that sort of mills which grind out woollen fabrics. The mills were cocked on the bank in the next village down the river.

Jackie occupied himself between the scene of industry and its administering office in Boston, and Windsor made it a point to drop in at the roaring mills every day or so, though he always felt rather apologetic to Jackie and their Master of the Works, the mighty Baldwin, for taking up their time. He experienced a slight sensation of wonder when this wise, brave, patient, powerful Baldwin treated him with ineradicable respect.

The mills with a great uproar of bands and wheels utilized the force of the river which fell below in a cataract. After a brief visit with Baldwin, in which the two men exchanged veiled looks of admiration and faith, Windsor nearly always came out and stood leaning awhile on the bridge above the fall, half-drunk with the noise of mechanisms and the boiling water that surged below.

This day he was standing there, his elbows on the rail, wishing that there was no such person as Mrs. Tredegar, or at least that he had never pulled her about by her chain. He had avoided her since that night on Giulia's terrace. It appalled him to think that he had uttered the word "love" to her. What could have possessed him? The mystification of her reply filled him with annoyance.

"If you love me you're as good as dead."

He told himself that this woman had been making drama ever since she had come among them. She had been playing a game on them, and he had been selected for the summit of her hoax.

But even as he formed the interior phrases, he felt his eyes blurring upon space and in that space appeared the image of her mouth, with what he had called its pagan upper lip and the lower, Christian. The Christian lip seemed to tremble with the word *"Sorgen,"* the Danish word for sorrow.

He felt himself disturbed by strong wanting. He had forgotten what it was to feel active wanting, and he was so disinclined for it that his nerves suffered as with indigestion.

In the midst of this he became aware that a strange man had come away from the door of the mills where he had apparently been speaking to Baldwin, and was now descending the rocky path toward the bridge. Windsor, dazed with his reflections and the uproar of the waters, turned his head more directly, and with a slight curiosity questioned the appearance of the newcomer.

He had a foreign air of arresting distinction and moved with a grace without strength hard to describe. He must have been about forty-five years old and had what struck our friend as one of the most sheerly noble faces he had ever seen.

Windsor's gaze increased in fixity as he became convinced that it really had a singular beauty which might be defined as beauty in pain. Every feature expressed habitual pain, whether of the mind or body could not be told. In the brief moment these impressions were gathering, the onlooker was struck by this appearance of rooted distress, on the extraordinarily graven lips and in the gray cavernous eyes. The nostrils of the straight chiseled nose seemed distended with excitement. The man's waist, slender and long, was defined by the cut of his coat more than is customary among American tailors: he carried a thick bamboo walking stick and gray gloves perfectly fresh and laid fastidiously together. His shoes, very slim and thin soled, had a foreign look; a black silk scarf was folded across his breast, though the day was warm.

"How do we come by this bird?" thought Windsor, turning his eyes away, for he felt that he had been rather inconsiderately staring. Then he began to realize that the man was coming along the bridge toward him with a definite intention: now he was at his side.

"So, I find you at last." He panted. Windsor permitted himself to stare. The intruder took off his hat to press a fine handkerchief to his forehead, in the middle of which there was a large scar. He revealed abundant, rather rippling brown hair with two streaks of white like wings at the side, seeming the more white above his skin, most deeply tanned as if by tropic suns. His expression and movement had the effect of extraordinary gentleness as if, thought Windsor, he belonged to a race bred to gentleness within an inch of their lives. And yet, he felt that in all the walks of his life among people of moderate emotions he had never seen a face so marked by something indescribably immoderate.

"So you are Mr. Windsor," said the stranger in a highly refined unfamiliar accent.

Receiving an arctic bow, he said no more for a moment, but regarded our friend with profound examination, his gray eyes rather startling, set as they were in the darkly coloured visage. Windsor took his elbows from the rail and inquired if he might be of some service.

"No, no. No one can be of any service to me," returned the other. "I am dying." He put his hand to his breast. "Of this, you know. A rather interesting manner of dying: as it is certain, but attended by a mere modicum of pain. I have precipitated the end by coming to this blasted country. It has done me great harm: but it seemed to me the one last necessity. . . . I could not contemplate my dissolution without having seen you."

"What on earth did you want to see me for?" asked Windsor none too politely.

"Don't be offended, I beg," said the other. His voice was remarkably deep and rich, but he breathed heavily.

"I must know as expeditiously as possible what you are like. And men are never like themselves under the influence of anger. It is like wine in which, contrary to the adage, there is no verity."

"Well, you must admit all this seems rather odd," returned Windsor, taking off his hat and in his turn applying a handkerchief to his brow.

"Thanks, I can tell much better without the hat. The features alone do not give it all without a knowledge of the conformation of the head." Windsor clapped on his hat.

"You insist on being annoyed," said the other with a sigh, which immediately produced a startling cough. He fumbled hastily for another handkerchief than the delicate one he had used before and put it over his mouth. Windsor turned away, not to see the stain.

"I'm sorry," he said.

"You would be sorry," rejoined the stranger, having got the better of his fit of coughing. "You have a gentle nature, which is capable of all sorts of generosity. But you are so rooted in conventionality that you feel an obligation of annoyance if anything out of the customary occurs. A man like me, living as it were out of life, might commit the error of discounting this mental constriction. I should not have been so precipitate . . . perhaps you would find it easier to lay aside your disinclination if you understood my state of being just now in great haste to get done whatever I must get done."

Windsor showed that he was somewhat touched.

"Doubtless I shouldn't be so prickly," he said, "if you'd be so good as to explain yourself."

"Ah, this is precisely what I cannot do," was the reply.

"Then let us close the interview." Windsor started away, but as he did so the other drooped with such dejection against the rail that he hesitated. "That is, if you're quite sure I can't do anything for you. . . . I might at least help you back along this villainous path. I suppose you've got a car?"

"Oh, yes, I don't need anything. The only service you can perform for me is to let me know you as well as possible in a short time. . . . If you would just try to transplant yourself in imagination for a little while out of this situation in which you live . . . this shell that holds you of convictions of what is gentlemanly and what is not. . . . There are many occasions in our existence outside of this concentrated little world of yours where the question of gentlemanliness does not enter at all. . . . There are intrepid moments when the essential enemies, Life and Death, are in deliberate confrontation: where as in the middle of a desert, a man treats any other man as a familiar; or as with the shipwrecked, when one will die embraced with an unknown for warmth and never ask his name."

"You're a strange man," said Windsor.

"Yes, I am strange, far stranger than you think. But I fancy with those fine eyes of yours, full of unused penetration, you have already observed that there's nothing palpably indecent about me. My name is Carmarthen."

"Well, if you want to go on talking," said our friend desperately, "let's get out of this frightful noise. Give me your hand. There's a bench up there on the bank where the howl can't reach us. . . . One is battered from head to foot with these detonations of wheels and waters."

"Oh, I'm used to engines, rails, tunnels, squealing ships, yelping sails, bawling seas, everything that pounds and urges. There's a kind of safety in hullabaloo."

He mounted the path by Windsor's aid, then sank rather exhausted on the bench. The cliff now interposed a barrier between them and the mill and the cataract. Below them the water sobbed, convulsed, recoiled, and fled from the violence it had suffered.

"Can't I bring you something from the mill—a glass of water?" asked Windsor with solicitude.

"No, no thanks. I've some brandy here." The stranger drew out a very small flask of silver and lacquer, wrought all over with an unusually fine Japanese design. After he had swallowed a sip from it, he let Windsor take it for examination, and our friend went on holding it in his hand with an occasional glance at its intricate beauties.

"Why did you say I was full of unused penetration?" he asked.

"You know why," returned the stranger, his handkerchief again at his lips. "You know how little you have cared to look."

"I care now."

"Oh, yes, you care now," acquiesced the other. "For the first time in your life you know what it is to shake to the marrow with the fury of penetration, the frenzy for knowing something, the famine for seizing something. . . . You've cared more about beauty than it's fashionable among your sort to say. . . . You've liked books and tolerated people. Because those you knew were only tolerable. It isn't in your nature to love much without reason. You are sluggish . . . but touch your faculty for adoration and you are on the march."

"Are you a man with second sight out of the East?" said Windsor with nothing pleasant in his smile.

A large nondescript dog now came running toward them and began for no reason to make a violent protest against their being there. He addressed his chief displeasure toward the dark and unusual stranger. Windsor was trying to soothe the creature with friendly words when something so angry in the canine eyes riveted above the snarling mouth upon Carmarthen's face made him glance at their object. He was startled to see the rage there matching that of the animal.

Now the man stood up with a fearful intake of breath, held his stick above his head a moment, then threw it far from him to the ground. The foolish dog ran after it, carried it in his mouth a few paces, let it fall, and, forgetting his passion, ran harmlessly away.

"That was a clever notion," said Windsor. "Almost any dog will run after a thrown stick."

"I didn't think of that," returned the other, almost collapsing on the bench. "I was afraid I would strike him."

He sighed and made the sign of the cross. "I was afraid I would kill him."

"I should have thought you were of an ethereal mildness."

"Windsor, thank God that you don't need to pray—grovel and pray against anger."

He covered his eyes with his fine hand, and our friend was astonished to see his lips silently moving, it seemed with Latin words.

Along with the irritation Windsor experienced at this person's daring, he had been conscious of an indignant sort of attraction. Twice there came over him an impression that he had once been attached to such a man. He could almost feel a dear familiarity in his idiosyncrasies.

Against his will he felt this creature was speaking from some condition of the mind or spirit higher, or if not higher, more achieved, than his own. He seemed to feel himself in the presence of uncomputed superiority: that there had been grave explorations in consciousness here, exploits in feelings, erudition in grief, untested by him. As Helga had said of a certain poet, "Here there is thought hot with love and love cold with thought."

His face must have taken on less of rigidity with these reflections, for when Carmarthen looked up he said, "It is the bright unused benevolence that I came to see. And there it is; all there . . . you are safe. You are safe, although at last you are entirely alive and dangerous. And how intelligent you are becoming! . . . That is, you have got it out. It is in use. Don't you notice it, day by day? And enjoy the surprise and the dazzle? . . . You will not be a bore. . . . Ah, you have liked many things before, but now you are in a passion. Now you are valuable."

Windsor had sat with a petrified smile. But he was beginning again to feel an active resistance. He was on the point of exploding into protest, when he was muted by the spectacle of the other, who now broke into astounding tears.

He wept as if his heart were broken utterly. Windsor thought he had never seen any woman or child weep so. It was as if all the human tears he had never seen had been gathered up to be spilled at last at his feet. His own eyes, which never moistened, were filmed a little at the sight. He was at his wit's end. He was afraid to look or speak. He gazed miserably down at the

Japanese flask and followed the interwoven lines of the design that converged toward the centre.

The other rose at last, drying his eyes with several handkerchiefs: the stain showing brightly on the one. He sobbed out apologies, and Windsor gave back huddled words of bewildered regret. Then, with incoherent good-byes on both sides, the madman was gone.

It was a moment before our friend recovered himself enough to realize that his visitor had really gone away with unsteady steps and that he, Windsor, was still holding the flask in his hands. He ran after, calling, as far as the mill. He was very much moved. He now very definitely wanted to express kindness, almost affection for that stricken being. He wanted to see again the tortured beauty of that face. He cried out to Baldwin, who stood at the door of the mill:

"Baldwin, who was that man?"

"Don't know, sir. A queer behaving gentleman. Told my kid it was dangerous to beckon in a woody place because of them gods and things. . . . Been asking people about you for days. Asked me. Got about enough to grease a flea's whisker."

Windsor stood in the road musing. Not till then did it come to him that he had noticed a letter engraved in the middle of the flask where the curious traceries drew together. He lifted it and saw the letter H—the name Helga. He broke into a run. Beyond the turn of the road there was the wild barking and yelping of a dog.

When he rounded the turn a car was disappearing farther on in its own dust. He stopped. At his feet lay the foolish dog that had besieged them, his head smashed in. Beside him was the stranger's heavy stick.

CHAPTER XXVII THE STRANGE WAYS OF MRS. TREDEGAR

SHE squints, doesn't she?" asked Giulietta.

"For Heaven's sake, don't say such a thing about her delicious eyes," cried Giulia.

"Well, it's squinting when you nearly shut your lamps and peek out, isn't it?"

There were very few topics upon which Giulietta found her mother receptive to her discourse. Mrs. Tredegar was one.

"Funny her saying, 'What's afoot here?' when she rambles into people's houses, isn't it?" she remarked.

Giulia agreed that it was, but added that she rather liked the practice of exhibiting a friendly and human interest.

"In your room yesterday," Giulietta went on, delighted to find her adored parent inclined to commune with her, "she asked me if it would be wrong to take out some of the books and look into them. . . . I told her to go to it. . . . 'Why, they almost all have Mr. Windsor's name in them,' she said. I told her he always kept a heap of books in your shelves and was always lending them to Dad. She said she thought she'd pretty soon begin reading books, too. Queer bird! . . . She was looking perfectly gaudy."

"In a red dress?"

"No, in white."

"Why gaudy, then?" asked Giulia.

"I mean creamy. Good stuff to look at. . . . She's tricky too, in her own beautiful way. . . . I mean she's got an eye out for trouble." Giulietta then related that Mrs. Tredegar in the village had revealed a surprising suspicion that the storekeeper had cheated her.

"They always do if you don't watch them, you know," she had said with a strange unusual look. It had really been a rather sly calculating look. She had asked Giulietta to help her add up the sum her purchases had amounted to and make it tally with the money she had left in her purse. Then she had asked the young girl what she would take not to tell that she, Helga, had been inadequate to the arithmetic. She had offered Giulietta money.

"You must be bats!" had been the rejoinder, and Mrs. Tredegar had said, "I don't want them to have more causes for merriment over me than they have already."

"If she went so far as to offer you even money not to tell about it," said Giulia, plunged in thought, "why have you told me?"

"Oh, I knew nothing she might do would put *you* off her," returned the young girl with a sudden uncertain flush. "You're as gone on her as I am. . . . She calls Windy the Arabian Knight. . . . I don't know which way she spells it. Maybe she means he's an Entertainment, an Arabian Night."

She threw her magnificent legs over the arm of the chair and sank far down into it until her round chin rested on her breast. Presently she began casting sidelong glances at her mother, and after a silence produced:

"Is Windy getting that way about her too?"

It was the custom of both Giulietta's parents to dispense with replies when her inquiries were inconvenient. Giulia dispensed with any to this.

It was true, some of Mrs. Tredegar's ways were considered a bit odd. She was said to stand at gates, lurk outside of houses, and listen at doors. Frequently her replies seemed to indicate a confused mind.

When Mrs. Worthington told her that Mrs. Copeland was noted for meritorious behaviour, for moral influences, censorship, enormous industry in philanthropy, energetic visiting of the poor and sick, Helga had uttered that curious word "*Havoc!*" adding dispassionately, "Still, she may not be *all* bad." This conclusion when reported was thought to be singularly wide of the mark.

Sometimes Mrs. Tredegar's manners were rather too good, as when she jumped acrobatically from her chair to help Mrs. Chick through a door with a bucket; or rather too bad, when she sat oblivious in the centre of an area Mrs. Chick was scrubbing, or went away in the middle of a dinner without a word.

But she was thought rather especially strange one day when, returning with Adelaide Worthington and Sylvia from tea at Mrs. Copeland's, the three ladies had witnessed the death of a man through the capsizing of his motor car. She had been entirely unmoved, it appeared, by the spectacle of the shattered heap in the road, the defeat of symmetrical perpendicular man, the full concession to horizontality and formlessness.

Sylvia had burst into helpless weeping. Mrs. Worthington had gone immediately to the dead man and bustled over him, making sure that he was dead, putting him in order. There was briskness in her anguish. Mrs. Tredegar had stood without movement. As Sylvia said afterward:

"The trouble with that woman is, she hasn't any heart! She wasn't even looking. . . . She was thinking of something else."

Then men and doctors had taken charge of the dead man, and the three women resumed their way. Sylvia had cried out through her diminishing sobs:

"I don't know what you're made of! I couldn't have stood there! . . . Why didn't you do something to help Adelaide, since you were perfectly calm?"

And the stranger had said:

"Mrs. Worthington has not the majesty of surgeons, priests, and undertakers, but she is mistress, nevertheless, of the vicissitudes of birth and death."

"But didn't you *care?*"

"I haven't time to suffer over murders committed by the innocent anger of mechanisms."

Such had been the odd reply of Mrs. Tredegar, and soon she had gone on talking about the birds, taking up the subject where she had left it off at the accident.

"The scarlet tanager's wife guards him while he eats. And she has so *much* to guard. . . . Chickadees do not believe in God. That is, we, the gods, worship them in vain, etc."

But this tale of Mrs. Tredegar's heartlessness was nothing to that told of her treatment of Grandpa Worthington.

That old gentleman had a rather lugubrious way of wishing aloud that he might shuffle off the mortal coil.

He had wished it in the presence of the strange lady, harping at length on the miseries of old age and the unfortunate inability to put an end to them.

She had indicated more sympathy than his usual listeners, and he had been considerably taken aback when she inquired if his country provided no lethal chambers with perfumes and violins for the relief of persons in his case.

When he had uttered a gasping negative, she asked if there was no member of his devoted family to "help him out."

And now it was a listening aunt of the Worthingtons who was going about the town with bated breath conveying the frightful news that Mrs. Tredegar wanted them to murder Grandpa.

When, however, wind of this reached the farmer who "ran" Mrs. Tredegar's farm, he said:

"She's queer in her ways, but, as far as I know, her morals are A No. 1."

When it reached Windsor, he turned on his heel with a wry smile. He had evaded seeing Mrs. Tredegar since he had given her "the Look" that musical night at Giulia's on the terrace and had received her strange utterances. It was more than a week since his encounter with the stranger, Carmarthen. He still carried in his pocket the Japanese flask which bore the name Helga, forgotten by that incredible man on the bench.

At times he intended to take it to her straight and make sure that there was a connection between the two incredible people. On other days he felt he would rather never speak with her again.

Giulia's fine eye was aware that there was something gravely the matter with him. He still occupied her thoughts a great deal. She made perpetual comparisons between the present Windsor and the Windsors remembered in innumerable past phases and scenes. He very rarely, and then reluctantly, thought at all of past Giulias and episodes.

Persons who have made a point of labouring the matter tell us that this is characteristic of man and woman out of love. "They won't let it alone!" some men in this state have lamented of women in the predicament.

Windsor let it alone. But Giulia, though her passion was no more alive than his, suffered from a sort of general grief and cogitated the subject. Perhaps she was of a more scientific turn and wanted to "work it out." Or perhaps it was because she read less in amiable books like those of Izaak Walton, Sir Thomas Browne, and Herrick.

"There's a beastly lot of talk about Mrs. Tredegar round the town," said Giulia after dinner. "These people have no pity on the stranger within the gates."

"Pity on the icthyosaurus within the gates," said Windsor. Charles had just borne Giulietta away, yet Windsor was not relaxing into the usual relief and tranquillity which followed that departure. He touched the piano, turned away, and impatiently closed it.

"It spews me out of its mouth after what it had last week. . . . That Fabio. Do you think the icthyosaurus enjoyed the music?"

"I don't know just in what way she enjoyed it," returned his hostess. Windsor paced about. He had not told Giulia of his meeting with the strange Carmarthen, though it was his habit to recount all sorts of events to her and relapse into chat over them. Their power of *causerie* together was one of their fundamental bonds. But there was no way to speak of that atrocious episode.

"She said she wanted you to have her Florentine chain," said Giulia.

"Her chain!"

"She said because you had laid hands on it."

Windsor could not say anything for the moment. Giulia resumed:

"She said she's going to wear it night and day to warm it, and leave it to you when she goes."

"When she goes!"

"You didn't know?" asked Giulia, rather surprised. "She says she has to get back to her mountain. She said the sea had risen and 'turbuled' round her gardened ship."

"Where is her mountain?"

"I don't know," returned Giulia, "but she says it's a pet mountain that comes when she calls it. . . . It's not on this side of the world. . . . It's probably the other side of the moon."

"Do you mean she's going to kill herself?"

The two stared at each other, open mouthed. They slowly subsided from their excitement and gave each other their familiar smiles, now charged with reassurance.

"So she couldn't stick us!" he said, leaning his elbows on his knees and looking at the floor.

"She couldn't stick us," repeated Giulia, "or we couldn't stick her."

"But isn't she harder to stick than we are?" said he, smiling a little.

"She's been so busy keeping out of your way. . . . It looked as if she could hear you coming a mile off, and presto! she'd be gone."

"But why should she keep out of my way?" he brought out at last.

"She said a rather curious thing," murmured Giulia, looking at him reflectively. "She said she hadn't 'done penance enough to meet your absolution, the papal infallibility and authority of your heart.' "

Windsor gave a sound very much like a groan. He felt the presence of unintelligible powers occupied with him. The infuriating intrusion of Carmarthen upon the privacies of his being seemed to interweave with the siege he had suffered from this incorrigible woman. He felt a web about him, not of inanimate threads, but of alert, astute, occult, and determined spinning. Something was getting at him. Getting at the special one who had asked through his adult years only that people should occupy themselves with him as little as possible, that he might be let alone.

But now she, the woman in it, she was going to let him go. She at least was intending to withdraw her spiders. She would fling back at him that last filament, the webby phrase about the authority of the heart, defying analysis. And she would hurl over his head the Florentine chain. Then, she would be gone. There would be no more. He would resume the devised tranquillity of his existence.

He sighed, laving his hurt arm along a cushion, as if to repose it from a strain. A threat was retracted, an injury of turbulence, disordination and decay evaded.

"You've got to help her."

He could not take it in at first that Giulia had thrown out this astonishing phrase with that unwonted sting of intensity. He turned to her rather slowly.

"You must not let her go," she emphasized.

He got up, letting his left arm fall to his side in its supine way.

"Why pitch on *me?*" he asked, smiling.

"Because you are the only one that can make her stay," she returned.

"Oh, let her go."

He went to the window and stepped through onto the porch that looked down to the river. Presently he called good-night and went off along the terrace.

Giulia sat inert a moment or two, then, snatching up her scarf, followed out across the grass. She did not want him to go away so soon. There was a chill of deprivation on her spirit. But he must have made off rapidly. When she reached the edge of the second terrace, he was visible considerably below. She saw him standing as if in meditation, then, lifting his head rather vigorously, he went down the slopes toward The River House, moving fast, as if with some decision.

CHAPTER XXVIII STILL STRANGER WAYS OF MRS. TREDEGAR: "NO KISS"

"Well, if you'll believe me . . . that woman wears sackcloth and ashes!"

Mrs. Johnson was in the spruce kitchen of The River House entertaining her sister-in-law, Martha Dodd, who had come down from Giulia's house to report how late a "certain gentleman" had stayed the night before, and that he was there again now, Mr. Charles and Miss Giulietta being off to Boston this evening as usual. This report had been punctiliously made for many years, but it had not lost tang.

And now Mrs. Johnson was taking her turn. They were having tea and cake by the flickering lamp.

"Sackcloth at night, if you please. . . . And she's spry as a murderer about hiding her linen. . . . I seen her with these very eyes washing out her night shimmy on the sly with her own hands . . . *and it's a gunnysack.*"

"Mrs. Tredegar!" choked out Martha Dodd.

The other continued:

"She locks and bolts her door like a thief. Only once she forgot. . . . When she gets into bed she pulls all the covers loose from the edge, rolls them around her, and curls up like a dog . . . and the ashes drifts out of her bed in the morning.

. . . I seen her take a pinch of ashes from the grate and put a bit on her forehead where that awful scar is . . . and a bit into her breast. . . . She's as dirty in her ways as a buzzard. . . . You'd think Christ never died to make us nice in our habits."

Martha Dodd recovered slowly and closed her mouth, which had been agape. The two went out through the corridor on tiptoe to the narrow windows that flanked the "front door," which commanded the river, the gardens, and the great trees of that side.

"There she is!" said Martha. "Walking around like a loony!"

"And do you suppose the man's out there, watching her yet?" whispered Mrs. Johnson.

"He looked as if he'd taken root when I came by . . . over there in the bushes."

"Was he old or young, aside from sick-looking?"

"About the age of a dead man," said Martha Dodd. . . . Then she gasped out:

"For the land's sake! There comes a certain gentleman!"

The two scuttled back into the kitchen.

Windsor had stopped before Mrs. Tredegar could hear him where she was pacing along the river bank. He looked back curiously into the ragged growth of young trees through which the path had led. He retraced his steps. A man had coughed behind him. He parted the boughs. There stood the stranger, Carmarthen, sheltered from the brilliant moonlight. From where he stood, he had been able to command the garden and the river bank where the mistress of the house was walking.

Windsor started a confused and angry question. Carmarthen fixed his cavernous eyes on him and with a staggering smile laid his finger on his lips. The next moment he was gone.

Whatever impulse had brought Windsor here, it was now frozen to death inside him. Without looking toward the object of his visit, he started away, perplexed, offended, sore.

But she came rapidly across the moonlit space, the chain about her neck, rattling down her bosom, swinging out, almost clashing in the silver quiet. A cloak of red velvet swung from her shoulders, nearly to the ground, and with it swung and "turbuled" her long hair, which was let down.

"You are there?" she asked.

"Come over here, you and your red wings!" he said, drawing her again toward the river. She felt the hand on her arm trembling. He was almost suffocated by the emotion that was surging back upon his frozen heart.

"I want that chain that rings and runs down your breast," he said in a stifled voice. "Who are you, anyway? . . . I want that golden thong. I mean to wear it night and day. . . . No, don't give it to me. . . . Let me take it by force. You said it was mine because I had laid hands on it. . . . Hold it . . . I want to rob you."

"You can't rob me," she replied. "You have no substance. You are my Love-of-air."

"You are the red dame in a red romance to-night," he continued, still in that obstructed voice, as if there were something the matter with his throat. "You are no teasing shadow, no infuriating allegory. . . . You are a thing to feel . . . your feet of air are solid, with sandals of bull's hide. . . . You are red and in love . . . you are my Dame-in-love. I'll make you pay for this redness. . . . Is this a banner, or your hair?"

His two hands, the strong one and the frail, were clenched again on the chain by which he held her. She clung to it. His look was wild, and her eyes widened on it.

"I saw you coming down the slope, but I did not think you were coming here," she said, like a woman entranced and talking in her trance. "Coming with your retinue of legionary angels and doves, your palanquins of captive saints and your royal guard of seven hundred centurion angels with antlers. . . . You are Michael."

"I'm a mighty lame Michael," said he, in a voice from the heart she had never heard from him before. "A lame Michael with only one wing, and that is broken. . . . And my heart is broken to fragments, Helga. . . . It's broken with its own stupidity. . . . Did you know a heart could break from sheer stupidity? . . . That's why I'm not fit to come near that living heart of yours. . . . That's why I can't love you. You understand that I don't love you?"

She did not answer, only looking at his lips as if too entranced by their form to take account of the sounds that came out of them.

"But I am going to get this chain from between your breasts," he added suddenly. "If I ever have sense enough to die, I shall be found with your chain round my neck."

He swept it over her head, the long hair clinging to it upward and impeding. Then he hung it on himself, and loosing his collar began thrusting it inside his inner shirt where it could be heard rattling down the naked breast within.

"It's cold," he said, closing his eyes with a shudder.

" 'Whoever comes to shroud me, do not harm
Nor question much
That subtle wreath of hair about my arm;
The mystery, the sign you must not touch.' "

"Did you make that poem just now?" she asked, still talking in her trance.

"A fellow named Donne made that," returned Windsor. "He was 'some old lover's ghost.' "

"I think I shall make a poem of your words when you are gone," said she. "I shall string them . . . though I never made a poem before."

"You never made anything that wasn't a poem," said he. "There is a petal in your hair."

"With all its ballads?" she asked. "I should not have received you with my hair like this, perhaps." She looked doubtful.

"I didn't know it would be like this," he said, lifting the mass on either side. "I didn't know that woman hair would be like this."

"You mustn't touch it," she said, taking it out of his hands. "A barber in Singapore, an old Frenchman who had been a soldier, told me not to come back to him any more. He said, 'Madam, you don't know that there is a very intricate relation between the barber and the hair.' "

"I'm not a barber," he exclaimed. "I must touch it. I must batter it down."

His movements and his speech had become very slow. . . . She saw his face once more as on that night at Giulia's, taking on the aspect of a man in the act of dreaming. His eyes were converging in that thievish fashion as she had seen them on the terrace. She watched him as if her life depended on it, while he held her by the hair. Again it was "the Look."

Then, slowly and yet with swiftness, a sort of deliberate swiftness like that of the sun when it has seemed fastened in the meditation of its descent . . . and yet has gone with swiftness, with unbelievable furtive abruptness into the sea . . . so slowly and dextrously he had gathered her entire in his arms.

They fitted together as they stood, all their stature, height, depth, breadth with exact fitting, as the projections and retreats of a mountain's undulation fit with precision into the thick adhesive cloud that presses itself upon it. Then, like the enfolding and interpenetration of a cloud through all the interstices of its prey, there flooded through them an unspeakable content.

Down the length of their fronts pressed together in the precision of that fitting, there passed, straight as a bullet to their hearts, the knowledge that until this moment there had been for them nothing but famine. Not yet the parliaments of their brains, but their people . . . the citizens of their hearts and veins, knew that there had been no comfort before this . . . that before this they had always gone ill at ease. There had been lean fare of comfort . . . meagre. . . . Indeed, in the light of this full comfort, it seemed that hitherto through all the roads of life they had walked in pain.

They rested together, bewildered in that bright soft healed antithesis of pain. Their breaths met in the long sigh of the reprieved. The astonishment was greatest in Mrs. Tredegar, he being the attacker. Her eyes distended on his fixed face, his gaze concentrated on her lips. That face, too near for the proper focus of her sight, was blurred like a confusion in complicated music. Yet she could not look away. She stared, half blinded. There was no other place to look.

At last, beyond endurance, she closed her eyes. The moment the guard of her look was withdrawn, he clutched her closer, as if he would crush her life out. This clutch intensified until her head fell back, her mouth gasping. He let her go, sustaining her by the shoulders as he drew back. And yet, for another moment, he had to steady her.

When she could look again her look was dazed.

"I'm scalded," she said.

He stiffened at the word. It was not the right word for the salutary, sweet ardour of his warmth. His "fearful powers retired." Like a man awakened, he went away, the chain faintly rattling as he went. He stopped once on the hill and clenched his fists in a cheated gesture.

"No kiss!" he said vehemently aloud.

His being seemed to be bursting back around her like water downhill. He went on. He had not asked her about the flask still in his pocket, with her name on it, nor of the mysterious presence of the watching Carmarthen.

Mrs. Tredegar went slowly up to her room. There she lay down on the bed, making quite a show in the abstinent room, lying in her long blazing velvet cloak and lion-coloured hair spread wide. The two cats were at the foot. Mediæval sculptors sometimes carved small animals so, at the feet of sepulchral ladies: fawns, spaniels, ducks, and doves.

Presently she got up, took pen and paper, and wrote to her sister in her convent in Ireland:

> *Laeva ejus sub cápite meo, et déxtera íllius amplexábitur me. . . .*[1]
>
> Sister in beautitude, Eleanor, greetings and love from my abundant house to yours.
>
> What I proposed, no implored, in my last, O my Dove, was that you would consent to leave off your shirt for a time so that

---

[1] His left hand is under my head, and his right hand shall embrace me.

I might leave off mine . . . and our ashes. I only asked it for a little time. For I have known of late that I must go away from this place, and then it will not matter what penances I resume, even to the spiked girdle of Lima. . . . Now, it appears, the time will be shorter than I thought, and because of its shortness I wish to exchange permanent thorns for transitory roses. I implored you, and you refused, implacable as a celestial being. Now, what you have worn your hemp for, viz.: my living in a state of marriage with our uncle, is long done with. I've told you that years ago. But you say you must go on as long as you live for his sake and mine.

What I have worn mine for in addition to that, you cannot know. The end of *that* sin has no date, nor penance any paid-in-full.

All I ask is a short respite in which to discover laughter . . . when this period is finished, I go where there will be no laughs.

The just man builds his wall beyond revoke of trumpets. But marauders of the mind strike tents and try fresh deserts. In a nutshell, I want to eschew sackcloth and live merry. For a week.

Nigra sum, sed formósa, fíliæ Jerúsalem: ídeo diléxit me Rex, et introdúxit me in cubículum suum.[1]

---

[1] I am black, but fair, O ye daughters of Jersualem therefore the King delighted in me, and brought me into his chamber.

CHAPTER XXIX IN THAT SUMMER LONG AGO

Windsor was under Mrs. Tredegar's window at dawn. There was a wild fanfare of birds and the Gregorian chant of pigeons. The face she bent out was pale.

"Come down," he said. "You owe me something that has got to be paid before another night."

They went away along the river bank. He showed her where the first spears of sunrise were beginning to thrust over the hills. He showed her the light already suffusing the upper regions of the mountain across the river.

"I wouldn't call that cosy little thing in its furbelows a mountain," said she. "Mountains are naked and broken-hearted."

"Are you all right?" he asked anxiously. "Did you sleep?"

"Did you?"

"Not for a minute," he returned. "Neither did you, my poor dear."

"I'm bright as a mouse," said she. "I've got a fine ship under me. . . . But your hands are trembling."

"I trembled all night long like a wet dog," he rejoined. "Nothing can save me but a kiss."

Before their kiss was done, the spears of sunrise circled a flaming shield, and an attack of bird cries beat round them on every side. They fell apart and stood looking down. At their feet, in a moist place, innumerable tiny pale blue butterflies were dancing.

"I tremble worse," said he. "Again."

They fell rather than leaned together and stood once more fitted into that consummate locking of last night, from head to foot. His invisible chain ground its links. His right arm was strong; the left did its fragile best to weld the tight circle.

"Are you afraid of me?" he asked, releasing her, anxious at sight of her pallor.

"Yes, but you are friendly and companionable as a lame angel."

"You mean if he were not lame he would not be so friendly? I am not friendly. . . . Again."

This time he took hold of her with less civility, and when they separated once more they both seemed quite shattered. He quoted:

"I wonder, by my troth, what thou and I
Did till we loved?"

"Did you make that?" she asked.

"A fellow named Donne, again," said he. "Jackie is the only poetaster of this town. I never lifted up a single tone, O Dame-in-love."

"Your song is the highest of all," said she. "I myself never made a poem till last night. I made it of your words, bead-strung."

She took a paper out of her bosom, and he read,

"THE BALLAD OF THE GOLDEN THONG

"There was a may 'clept Dame-in-love,
The bravest of brave women all,
When she walked out the Queen walked in
And bouded in her painted hall.

"When she walked out the knights were pale,
And some were swounding like the dead;
She wore a cloak unto her back
Like eagle wings all bloudy red.

"She wore a shoe unto her foot,
One shoe was for her Love-of-air;
The people said, 'She wears no snood,
Is this a banner, or her hair?'

"Then up and gat fair Dame-in-love,
All in a summer long ago,
And hung an antic chapalet
Upon her bosom, pale as snow.

"She hung an antic chain of gold
That 'tween her breasts did ring and run;
She said, 'I'll give this golden gawd
To one who is no woman's son.'

"Oh, what is this that walketh here,
Where gillyflowers are sweetly set?
The strangest angel now, God wot,
That ever mortal may hath met!

"The strangest wight from Heaven high
That mortal woman ever found,
One broken wing he only hath
That traileth longly on the ground.

"One broken wing he only hath,
And lame and lovely walketh he;
His heart is broken in his hand,
And he is wounded woefully.

"Oh, lame and lovely walketh he,
His heart is shapen like a lute,
He singeth long, he singeth strong—
She quoth, 'This is no mortal song!
Lo, I am slayen by a flute!'

"What seek ye, seek ye, strange angèl,
So lame and far from fiefs above,
Who singest long and singest strong,
Like flutes that make a fearful song?
He quoth, 'I seek the golden thong
Between the breasts of Dame-in-love.' "

Windsor was slightly repelled. Her having written this had something flagrant in it, of too easily, too thoroughly taking him. Yet there were charm and curiosity in his distaste.

"Why did you write it like that?" he asked.

"Isn't that the way to write poetry?" she inquired, with her befuddled look. "It is very beautiful because it has your words in it."

"It's the manner I'm talking about," he returned. "You've read a lot and thought a lot of old poetry."

"I have no reading. There are no books among the sacks and barrels."

"What do you mean?" he asked.

"In the holds of ships."

"Well, where have you heard this sort of thing?"

"There are ballads in the striping rain on seas. . . . I wish I were bathed."

She had come down too quickly to him for any proper toilet.

"You shall be bathed and I too," he said.

Below them was her cove, hidden by the great rock like a flat Negro head that projected into the water.

"See that rugged fellow lying there in the quicksilver," said Helga. "He muses, the Ethiopian. He can't get all his thought done. Meanwhile, the water splashes over his closed eyes all the time and plays in his lips."

On the hither side of the Ethiopian, Windsor disappeared, and in a moment she heard him splashing. On her side, she descended and took off the garments she had thrown on, as languidly as if she had been ill.

He came out of the water first and hurled himself about a little to dry his skin. The sun poured down glinting on his shapeliness. He was a proper man except for his lame arm, which was slightly narrower than the other and like a dull playmate dragging in the game.

The water dripped from his dark hair, gilded at the edge. His "bang" hung straight above his eyes, decorated with glittering drops. The chain rattled on his breast as he danced. By habit a rather soft-going man, just now hilarity cropped out of all his movements.

Picking up his clothes, he came against the familiar feeling of the flask marked "Helga" which Carmarthen had forgotten. It was always in his pocket. But in his new fervours with her he had never found the moment clear enough to put a question. As he drew on his clothes he began to grow inhumanly quiet. Something had come over him that made him move almost with an appearance of stealth.

He finished booting, buttoning, and buckling, the Florentine chain left outside his shirt, and stood rooted, breathing carefully. His aquiline face with its mouth open over the long teeth was directed toward the mass of rock that intervened between him and the other bather. The eagle contour had at this moment really a resemblance to that bird of prey. Inside him there was riot. In his imagination he was measuring the rock, the way to it, the convenient place, the *look*. All his being was in the desire, ardently stealing toward that look, burning to *see* what might be dazzlingly there.

"Speed up a bit, you!" he called out, suddenly going farther away, not to hear so well the water sounding against that unknown bright blinding obstacle.

When she came, he took off the chain and, hanging it on her neck, thrust it down inside her clothing.

"Here, take this," he said, "and warm it between your hills before I wear it away."

"My warmth is cool," she remarked.

"Oh, yes, how cool you are!" he said, putting his face down at the base of her throat. "To-night your innocent spirit will hang over me like a cool bird."

"Yes," she replied vaguely, "like a cool, cool, cool, cool, cool, cool bird."

They went farther up along the river; then, smitten with hunger, climbed through the fields to the house of her farmer and surprised the worthy family with entreaties for food. The woman fed them in the porch, going and coming with speculative eyes. The farmer had already gone into the fields, but children, poultry, turkeys, guinea hens, white rabbits, lambs, dogs, sparrows, flies, a calf, and an infant pig attended at their repast.

The woman waved at the attendants occasionally with her apron, never taking her deeply considering blue eyes off her guests. She was already hearing the exclamations of the neighbours when she would have told of these wanderers at six o'clock in the morning. It was the birthday of one of the little boys. It appeared he had been born at six o'clock of such a morning. He had a metal clock in his hand which he was watching carefully. He called out with great satisfaction: "Now, I'm eight years and five minutes old." Presently he announced, "Now I'm eight years and eleven minutes old."

The breakfast must have been rather prolonged in the sweet air and oblique shadows of morning, for as the wanderers were about to go, this little boy came round the house after an absence, still clock in hand, and shouted: "Now I'm eight years, one hour and fifteen minutes old."

"Of course, we shouldn't have done that," said Windsor, as the two descended once more to the river. He looked a little more like his usual self. His brows were serenely troubled.

"But we were so hungry . . . and it was easier getting it out of her at this hour than out of Mrs. Johnson."

"Ass that I am!" he went on. "My one idea was to avoid the fearful Johnson, and I ran head on into this mare's nest. . . . I should have gone up alone, bought something to eat as if I were out fishing, and carried it to you by the river." He felt a reaction of annoyance against her. "Of course, it couldn't have possibly occurred to you, Mrs. Tredegar."

"No." She seemed at peace with the event, watching the golden transit of an oriole.

"Do you understand what we're in for?" he persisted, very much ruffled. "That woman will see to it that everyone in town knows of this escapade. Her tongue was itching." Helga grew more attentive.

"Shall we go back and ask her not to tell?" she inquired, adding to his derisive shrug, "Or at least to tell only a few friends?"

For a moment Windsor had the aspect of a man who finds he has been kissing an idiot and, what is worse, wanting to kiss her more.

"What sort of a creature are you?" he exclaimed. "Surely you noticed how she was looking!"

"I thought she was looking at your beauty."

"Damn my beauty!" he exploded. "The cat was watching us like rats."

"Watching!" she exclaimed, narrowing her eyes with an alert and troubled look. "Why should she watch? You are not a slayer of men!"

"I think you ought to explain yourself to me," he said, remembering Giulia's analysis of Mrs. Tredegar. "There must have been some very unusual conditions in her entire life . . . A state of things we haven't any idea of . . . An isolation . . ." This person surely had no understanding of certain matters quite familiar to ordinary people. He felt estranged and betrayed before such crass difference. There was even a slight sensation of fear, as well as aversion at having reached across a gulf of such impenetrable lack.

"Well, whatever that woman may say," Mrs. Tredegar was considering, "she hasn't a leg to stand on."

"Scandal doesn't need a leg, it has wings," said he.

"Oh, you're talking of a little matter of scandal," she returned, with an air of relief. "I was thinking of hounds' ears pricked up, of burly awakenings."

"Explain."

"The police."

He laughed. And her face lost its appearance of trouble in looking at his mouth.

"When are you going to tell me about yourself?" he asked, thinking of the flask in his pocket, of her strange speeches, and the mysterious Carmarthen.

"I would rather tell you about you."

"And you don't mind our being the talk of the town?" he asked.

"I am beginning to understand your town," she returned. "You will never know when this Venetian town is talking. It whispers. . . . You are the calm strugglers for the decent, the pure, the perfect. You are cut and glassy. Venetian tailors of glass have been here . . . we must not doubt the deft and debonair."

"More dormant than debonair," said he, eyeing her with some return of pleasure.

"Couched masters in the art of dormancy," said she, "admirable to the sleepless runner."

"Still," he said with kindness, "you must not wear your heart on your sleeve."

"A heart is fashion's handsomest sleeve ornament."

"How do you manage to be such a sweet fool and still so wise?" he asked, once more candidly smiling.

"Wisdom must be like a cold kiss on reluctant lips," she returned, "unless you mean the divine equilibrium of thoughts like sweet monkeys, those mountebank angels swinging in a tree."

Windsor listened to her with the most mixed of feelings.

"I think you come into this unhappy town mad as Cassandra," he said.

"You are thinking again of the talking," said she, with a sigh. "Could we venture to forget it, since the hangman has no loop on you, Sweet Fellow?"

He was not sure that he altogether liked this title, and while he laid it by for consideration, he told her, rather sententiously, that ignorant girls called their sweethearts "fellows."

"How charming!" she said, and they went on a little while in silence.

"Well, for this one day," she added carelessly, "we're not badgered by ghosts. Come on, renegade!"

He seemed somewhat chilled, and followed her into the ever deepening woods without his previous elasticity. But presently the look of her neck at the back arrested his eyes, which travelled down along her person, her back bent forward as if she were hiding something. Her flanks and legs were moving with their leonine deliberation.

"I'm badgered by beauty," he said. . . . "I haven't wounded you, have I?"

"It takes an expert to wound me," she returned. "And, in any case, you would not insult a wound by healing it."

"We may as well be hanged for a sheep," said he a little later, with a renewal of his ardour. "Let's take down your golden fleece. . . . It's wet, and you've put it up badly."

She stopped obediently without turning round, and he pulled out the pins and let down her hair. He put the pins in his pocket as a custodian of treasure pockets his keys. It amused him to think himself for the moment custodian of her hair. He was a little disappointed, however, because the flow hid the waist and its gradual widening into the hips as she walked before him, but immediately the stuff itself made amends. It gan a life of its own, a vintage.

He took hold of Helga and they walked now side by side, he holding her a little before him and close because of the narrowness of the path.

"With one hand on your abundant shoulder," he said, "and one on the nape of your neck, under this plentiful harvest! . . . you, patient and befuddled beside me like a caught rabbit! . . . O Beauty! Hard, soft, sweet pulp!"

"I saw a woman in Ispahan," said Helga, "kissing her own shoulder."

" 'When first I saw thee,' " he quoted, " 'I resolved to honour and renown thee.' Only, I put it, 'honour and renounce thee' . . . and now I have thee by the hair."

"They left the burning towers," said she, "and went forth with their new Greek husbands."

"What am I going to do," said Windsor, "if this can't happen every day?"

"Don't be frugal with me," she rejoined. "Now, I have you plentiful, I shall waste you. Let us hope for delicious things in that summer long ago . . . not economizing on deliciousness. . . . There is no occasion for frugality in hope. As for me, the foul fiend biteth not my back. And a good job, too."

He asked her what she meant by "that summer long ago," and she explained that there was a good trick in looking at a happy occasion as if it were in the past.

"If it is now," she said, "it is insecure, trembling at the mercy of insignificant things. . . . But if it is imbedded in the inviolable past . . . it is secure. No one can undo it. No one can abuse the past. . . . And the past has long shadows. We shall have those large companions in our Now to make merry majesty. . . . Do you remember Windy and Helga by the river in that summer long ago?"

Windsor had a momentary feeling that he had bitten off more than he could conveniently chew. This woman seemed to make no bones of taking up the affair with both hands. She had the effect of rather hurrying with it, making hay.

"Do you still mean to go away?" he asked, a fragment of him hoping that she would say yes.

"The fiend-bitten never lives to make old bones, Sweet Fellow," she replied. "Impetuous Hell does not cool its heels long for its own man."

"I wish you would not say those obscure and extravagant things," he complained.

"Tell me what sort of things get under your skin," she cordially returned, "and you'll see how I'll not say them. Mum's the word."

A little later he said, "Here, give me my chain. You've warmed it enough. See, I take it with all its warmth. How warm it is!"

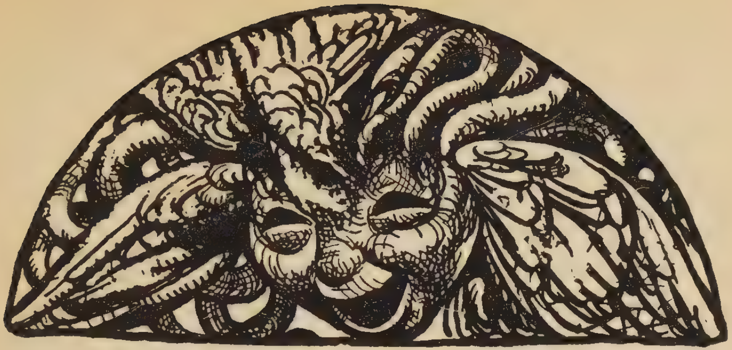
He put it back round his neck and inside his clothing, as he had done at first.

He left her before the sun was very high. The white night he had passed was beginning to tell upon him. The inclination for kisses fainted in him. He felt himself begin to drowse, to long for milder speech, for sleep.

They parted near the Ethiopian head, without further caresses. He glanced at the scar on her forehead with a slight repugnance. She had told Giulia it was a Cain-mark. Helga's tricks of mystification appeared before him as estranging. It was not the best moment for Mrs. Tredegar to bring forth:

"Your eyes are the two disks of my mother's breast. I suck."

"For God's sake, don't say things like that!" he exclaimed.



CHAPTER XXX JOHNNIES AND GRANDPAS: “WHO TOLD YOU TO WARN ME?”

WINDSOR was waiting in Adelaide Worthington’s drawing room. She had sent for him urgently, and he was annoyed, because Helga had engaged to meet him almost at this very hour by the river. And now Mrs. Worthington was delayed above by a resounding child who had just fallen down the back stairs, but she sent word Windsor was to wait. He paced about impatiently. It was a tiresome house to come to, always full of aunts and grandparents giving Adelaide support in her widowed state.

In the next room, Grandpa Worthington was “hearing” Johnny Worthington’s lesson in Christian Doctrine. An Aunt Worthington was sewing in the bay window, and little Letitia Worthington was sulking in a corner.

“God made the world in a matter of six days,” said Johnny firmly.

“I won’t have you say ‘in a matter,’ ” the grandpa shrilled out. “You said it before, and I told you it was a sacrilege, and what’s worse, a vulgar expression.”

“But uncle says it.”

“Not about his God!” The old gentleman bounced out of the room with all the bounce there was still left in him.

Patience, the littlest possible Worthington maiden, immediately rose from her play in the hall and followed the grandpa up the stairs. She made a point of this to catch him if he should fall, appearing almost infinitesimal as she held her arms out in readiness below his bowed back in its long-tailed black coat looking like a beetle. She was fond of the old gentleman, being still too young and debonair to feel the weight of his hand.

"Why don't you and Mother make Grandpa let me alone?" said Johnny to his aunt.

"He don't have to let you alone, because he's old, but you must let him alone and be kind to him."

"Why do I have to let him alone and be kind to him?" inquired Johnny.

"Because he's old," said the aunt.

"But why don't he have to be kind to me?" persisted Johnny.

"Because you're little. I mean . . . he is kind to you . . . only you . . ."

But it was too late.

"Oops!" roared Johnny to his sulking sister Letitia. "Hooray! we only have to be kind while we're little! . . . After that we don't have to let anybody alone!"

"I don't want to not let people alone," said his sister who was of a lymphatic turn.

"That's because you're a feather bed instead of a girl."

Johnny looked at her ardently, wishing he might jounce her about a bit. But he dared not. Previous efforts had never come off well.

He thought:

"Oh, but I'll jounce her when I'm a grandpa."

Then a sadness came over him. The state of grandpa seemed so infinitely far away. He was trapped in his beleaguered littleness. He came into the drawing room and went under a table to brood upon his captivity. Presently Windsor was stopped in his walk, by the invisible Johnny roaring out, "God made the world in a matter of six days!" He was removed by his aunt.

"Johnnies and grandpas. Johnnies and grandpas!" It seemed to Windsor who resumed his interrupted pace that these were the principal inhabitants of this miserable town.

He saw himself and Jackie pantaloon-pestered under the reign of Grandpa Windsor . . . the revolts of Jackie . . . the quellings by their father who was so fond of them when he was not bilious.

The town which had seemed a poorly pleasant place to Windsor hitherto, appeared at the moment completely stupid and sterile because of the woman waiting down there by the river. He pined for her night and day. He felt his heart withering for her voice saying preposterous things that would probably fill him with annoyance.

At the thought of her solid youth everything seemed desiccated and unsubstantial, like Grandpa Worthington. At the thought of her windy mind, the ideas of this little world weighed with the consistency of lead.

"You have to let him alone because he is old, and he doesn't have to be kind to you because you are little." This was the sort of stuff they were feeding their Johnnies. And she, Helga, yesterday had said to a tiny boy in the road, "All the thrushes are waving their hats because you are a child." How the little creature had looked up into the woods! And yet, of course . . .

It had not been so well, perhaps, when she told the young ploughman they had seen against the sun:

"Oh, I thought it was *you* that was streaming light."

No, that sort of thing was rather tiresome in the long run. He was tired. It seemed a long stretch down the slopes to the river where she was waiting with her fatiguing fantasies.

It was not so bad when she told a wind-blown tree to stand by its main royal halyards. But he could not go "Bully bucko," or when she had said, on a whiff of preparing supper coming up from Mrs. Johnson's kitchen:

"A blue stink in the galley."

If she ever explained herself, if she ever really answered, it would perhaps have been easier. But there was no way to get at her. She was evidently hiding something tight. If she explained how she got that way, she would be letting the cat out of the bag.

She was a suspect. She was outside the law, and the last person in the world for the fastidious Windsor to have got in love with.

"In love!" he thought. "I'm not in love—it is only that I . . ."

The image of Helga loomed before him. He felt his hand on the nape of her neck as they walked, under her hair.

"You've got to stop doing things with Mrs. Tredegar, my boy!"

It was Mrs. Worthington at last at the door.

"I'm nothing but a gnarled mass of maternity," said the right little, tight little woman, throwing herself into a chair. Court-plaster, adhesive tape, surgical gauze welled from her apron pockets.

"Just been patching up my squashed offspring," she explained. "Now, look here, my dear, it won't do."

"What won't do?"

"You know."

The child was heard howling for her in an upper room. She jumped up and made for the door.

"No, tell me what you got me up here for," said Windsor, impeding her.

"Well, I was told to warn you. . . . It can't go on, that's all."

"What can't go on? Who told you to warn me?"

"It. I'm not at liberty to say."

"You must," he persisted. "That child's just roaring for fun. You can tell by the hoot. . . . Out with it. Who told you to warn me?"

"Well, then, Charles."

Windsor heard her running up the stairs. He went away slowly in profound rumination.

"Why Charles?"

CHAPTER XXXI VIOLENT LOVE

IT WAS well after dark when Windsor found Mrs. Tredegar in the place of the rendezvous on the river bank. He meant to ask her definitely about Carmarthen and other baffling things, including the ways of Charles.

He had gone home after his visit to Mrs. Worthington with her Johnnies and grandpas and bombs of information. He had lain down. And now he was to find that Helga had waited there all day. The meeting had been arranged for ten o'clock in the morning, and here it was nine at night. He was appalled. She had had nothing to eat but wild-rose berries. She had drunk several times from the river, lying prone.

"Man, the proudest of the beasts, must abase himself the most to drink," she said. "Are you loved enough?"

"But why did you stay here when I didn't come?" he asked.

"You told me to wait, Sweet Fellow." Her voice was rather faint. He was struck with slight fear at her exceeding childishness.

"What am I going to do with a madwoman like you!" he asked, gathering her up from the ground. Tenderness welled from his heart in such a flood it made him almost lose his balance. He led her along the path until they nearly reached the house.

"Go, go in and eat," he said, kissing her wildly "cheek and chin." "Then come back. I shall be here."

"Are you loved enough?" she said in going.

When she returned, just visible between the thick leafy walls of the path, bending over, padding cautiously like a lion, he held out his arms.

Guiding her once more to the river bank, they sat down, their hands on each other's knees. The moon would come by and by. Already there was a faint adumbration of light beyond the hills.

"Are you loved enough?" she said.

"Listen, Sweet Fellow." It was he who had used the title. "Helga, I want you to be kinder to me."

"Kinder? I will be kinder than a quail."

"Oh, why did you say that? You throw me off so with your surprises. It is the unfamiliarity, no doubt. No one says 'kinder than a quail.' "

"Why not?" asked she innocently. "The quail runs far from her nest beneath the very feet of the enemy to lure him away."

"Oh, yes, of course, you had reason . . . I say you *have* reason. . . . So listen, I want you to be kinder. . . . I want you to reveal yourself to me. The truth is, I am really sick with a sense of unreality. I wake in the morning with a swimming head . . . at a loss. Unreal, unreal. . . . I doubt my own reality. . . . The worst of all . . . A man needs something to get hold of in this illusion that we live. . . . We keep from vertigo only by holding on to some familiar things . . . familiar . . . a house . . . a bed. A book where some fellow has been . . . left his man-Friday footprint. . . . My God, after swinging over the abyss of night, the smell of coffee throws a rope to your homeless soul! . . . Listen, Helga, when I didn't come today I was lying on my bed, it seemed. In truth I was eddying down a void. I was afraid my body wouldn't hold out. . . . I'm not well."

"When a man has doubted the strength of his body," she replied, "he has doubted the strength of his heart."

There was a pause after she said this; then he continued:

"Yes, I'm afraid for the strength of my heart. . . . I want more to hold on to. . . . I want you to make yourself clear to me, as one human being to another. Simply . . . do away with the allegory, the mysteries. . . . I may be asking too much, Helga, but I want your secret. . . . I want you to be *familiar* to me."

"I am a ghost," she said sorrowfully.

"Whose ghost are you?"

"My father's," she returned. "I didn't live long enough myself to make a ghost."

"You are doing just what I begged you not to. . . . I haven't the stomach for this sort of thing."

"No, ghostly men cannot deal with ghosts," said she. "Give up."

"You know I can't give it up. . . . You know I've gone too far. . . . What I experience with you is magic. . . . You exercise *la magie* upon me. I am enchanted and forlorn. . . . I ask you to throw me something to hold on to. In the midst of the incantation, let me feel some substance. . . . When I am begging for substance, don't you think it's rather hellish of you to tell me you're a ghost?"

"I am a child of Lucifer," she said. "You cannot hope sweet reasons from irremediable unexplaining hell."

He dragged her to her feet and crushed her against him. Her head fell back with such an effect of helpless sorrow on his shoulder that he could have burst into tears. The scar on her forehead was too near. He was repelled and then melted into compassion. It seemed the visible sign of inward wounds. He meant to ask her how she had come by it, but not now.

"I don't ask anything but this," he cried out. "Are you going away? Your dear cold throat will be my death! . . . Are you still going away? Helga, how you are trembling! Are you going away? Lean on me, lean! . . . Are you going away? Tell me nothing, nothing but this. . . . Are you going away?"

"No." She had said it with such violence as he had not dreamed her capable of. She had always presented a look of great control, of caution, or of phlegm. He pressed her in his arms and gave himself to a kiss. Yet, even as the long kiss proceeded, a fear went through him with its secret chill.

"Are you loved enough?" he said, taking her phrase.

"It is violent love," she replied. "Now, it is bright, bright bitter war."

CHAPTER XXXII DANGER FOR TWO

I JUST climbed in to bring you this note from Dad," said Giulietta. "Mrs. Johnson said you weren't there, also that she never sees you any more, night or day, and you sleep out in the fields like a cow." Helga took the envelope from the young girl, who was mopping her brow with an enormous checked handkerchief. She had come back from her vain search for Helga at The River House and found the object of her mission standing in front of Rosemary's door where Mrs. Tredegar after her fashion had been "lurking."

"Are you going in there?" Giulietta asked. "If you are, why don't you go? I've seen you hitched here for the last half hour as I weltered up the hill."

"I don't know," said Mrs. Tredegar, looking in a startled way at the envelope in her hand. The handwriting of Charles was formidable like his own bulk.

Mrs. Owen Tredegar. Important.

It was August, and there had been no rain. Enormous clouds had sailed over the town, implacably passing. They were passing now in herds.

"They will not fall on the hills, those new-born Centaurs, where they would gallop so sweetly," said Mrs. Tredegar, also mopping her brow. "Panting, we pray in vain. They thunder by . . . and then, the scoundrel blue."

The young girl eyed her as Helga continued:

"The sun is a livid murderer staggering down the sky. . . . The bird, the lover, is sick of his loving, and the singer is sick of his song."

"You seem to be pretty down in the mouth about something," remarked Giulietta. "If you're going in here I'll go with you. . . . I haven't seen Rosemary and the kids for a coon's age."

"We dare not," said Mrs. Tredegar, laying her hand on the young girl's arm.

"Anything wrong in there?"

Helga drew Giulietta away from the door and along the brick path to the gate.

"Did you know," she said, "that any animal you slay lifts up a female eye? . . ."

She noticed now that there was something less of the imperturbable to-day in the bovine regard of Giulietta. It looked as if there would be something more obstructive to her desire for kissing Mrs. Tredegar than that strange lady's disinclination.

"Of course Windy'd get it like the rest of us," she mumbled, turning her reluctantly reproachful gaze away from the other. "But, as I told Giulia, you can't help it."

"What is the matter with your sweet little eyes?" asked Mrs. Tredegar, seeing them spring with tears, and was staggered by Giulietta's answer,

"Don't you see, you've darn well *ditched* me!" Saying this, the young girl bolted off, leaving her friend transfixed behind her.

Helga moved away along the village street, beneath the Gothic arch of elms. She had left it and was descending toward the field of the bull, where Windsor would be awaiting her, when at last she opened the note from Charles, still hanging, sealed, in her hand. She read:

> You can't get by with this. Kept in Boston to-night, but when I come, there's going to be a little treat of ultimatum. CHARLES.

> P. S. Mailed all your letters to Wandering Willie, of course. Take note, he's not so far off as you think.

What Mrs. Tredegar had seen through the window of the house of the Reverend George was the spectacle of that gentleman lifting up what she had called the "female eye" of the slain, then plunging his head in his hands, and Rosemary staring at him as if she had got a blow on the heart. The looker-in had not heard what they were saying. There had not been many phrases.

George had come in calling, "Where is the Mystical Rose?" He had seen all the children for once away from her, playing in the kitchen garden with Mrs. Chick's daughter who was trundling the baby.

He had been thunderstruck to see the baby actually on its absurd feet, hanging from Mrs. Chick's daughter's hands like a little frog, and marching, mostly on air.

Before he saw this he had been terribly downcast over debts. All the children had had "summer complaint." There were new doctor's bills piled on the old, that tremendous one not paid yet for the last baby, though they had sold so many books. And they had hoped so to get central heating in the house before cold weather. It was frightful, trying to keep the children from colds with the little fires. . . . How had the ancestors got on! Perhaps their children had been hardier. . . .

He had been reflecting that bricklayers are paid better than preachers, with no need of keeping up a proper "Reception Room" for visiting ladies.

He had been very low when he caught sight of that marching baby. But the gallant spectacle had lifted his heart like a sail in a breeze. He ran into the house to find Rosemary, Rosemary soon to be released from that perpetual baby in her lap, her "nook." Not a sedentary Rosemary, rooted among diapers. A free, a running Rosemary, as of old!

She was standing by the window, but hidden from outside by the curtain. She was peeping out and hiding. He saw her profile and her long lashes against the white curtain. She wore a shawl, although the day was so warm, and there was something ungraceful about her figure.

The face she turned to him was as he had seen it before, pale, large eyed, anxious, with little blotches on its blemished translucence. The ankle that showed under the dragging shawl was swollen.

"Mrs. Tredegar was standing out there," she said. "I pine for her, but I haven't the gumption to see her to-day. . . . She didn't ring, and I think she's gone away. I was hugging her shoulder in my mind's arms."

"Rosemary!" He had meant to cry out the gorgeous news, "The baby is walking!" But he could not. He stared inquiry at her.

"Oh, my darling love," she tried to smile, "we're in a pickle again!"

"Why didn't I know! . . . Long?"

"Long."

She went toward him, but he stayed away. She stopped and said, with a strong effort at her usual brightness, trying to sound a little jocular:

"There are just two ways . . . one, not loving each other so much . . . being careful . . . not taking each other in our arms, our 'nooks' . . ."

"How *can* you!" he burst out, almost as if he were going to break into tears.

"Or," she went on, "do . . . what other women——"

She fell back before his horror, his anger. His innocent face was stony.

"Do you say that to me, a servant of——"

He fell into a chair and buried his face in his hands, as Mrs. Tredegar had seen him through the window.

"Oh, Rosemary," he groaned in the extremity of it all, "you've broken my heart!"

He got up presently, full of sorrow at the pang in her face, and wept on her shoulder. But Rosemary did not weep.

She went up to her room with heavy steps and stood leaning against the bed like one mortally stricken. George's words stung through her brain like acid. She repeated them all. Returning to one phrase, she said it aloud. "Do you say that to me——"

"No, no!" she exclaimed, shaking herself from the idea like a spaniel with a wet coat. "Yet, could there have been the faintest possible emphasis on the '*say?*' . . . What if the *saying* is the unpardonable sin! . . . No, no . . . Mrs. Tredegar said I was a knave with a nimbus. . . . I'm just a plain knave!"

CHAPTER XXXIII IN WHICH THE HERO FINDS IT HARD LOVING SO STRANGE A LADY

I WISH I had a handy seraph," said Helga, "with a violin, so whenever you came near there would be a long strain."

Windsor and she had been hiding from the rain in a hollow tree. And like sudden rainfall in the hot stress of summer the relief, the comfort, the astonishment they felt together had washed away the droughty sense of trouble in their environment.

"Don't forget your hat!" she cried, as they came out of their tree.

"Why the devil should I forget my hat? . . . Your hands are always dirty, Dame-in-love. . . . Now I know why."

She let fall two handfuls of earth, dry soil mixed with tree dust she had gathered at the base of their shelter. She was always picking up earth, pine needles, pebbles, roots.

"Getting friendly," she said. "The heroes and friends are there . . . after the friendless sea."

"I am ill from kissing you," he said, drawing his hand across his brow.

"I never thought I would nurse another man." He sulked when she said things like this.

"I hate your 'another,' " he said.

"But now," she said laughing, "now I know I've never had anything before. Nothing, that is, to call my own. Oh, I have called things my own before, but not to take delight in. . . . Taking delight is the point. That is what I really call my own."

"You have called them your own before," said he still sulking. "You never know when you put your foot in it. . . . You certainly have got on without studying people very much."

"There were two things I always looked for, to see whether they were watching or not."

He did not like this sort of thing, either, but just then he was overcome by her radiance, as the sun burst between two horizontal clouds and struck across her head and breast. She was not crouching her shoulders just then, and the two hills in her wet blouse were defining themselves.

"I am going to devour you to the bone," said Windsor, "and fill my hunger once for all."

"And mine," she returned. "Don't be abstemious about devouring my hunger. I have an old economy of hunger . . . I have heaped this hunger . . . penny by penny of hunger. What thrift! . . . Now we have plenty to spend."

"Let me tell you how you look," said he. "Your eyes are javelins."

"I know," she replied, "but I will plunge them into your heart and hide them. I love blindness, my master."

"I believe I am your slave," he rejoined.

"He is royal, my slave. . . . He is crowned with thorns and rubies."

"Let me tell you how you look . . ." he began again.

"I know," she returned, "I am the woman caressed. . . . I woman it worse than woman ever womaned it before, but I have no time to listen. I have no time for anything but to love you aloud. Pipe all hands up to hear!"

"I'll put an iron cap on that Mogul tongue of yours."

He stopped her talk with hard kisses. She walked at his side, subdued. The grass at the edge of the bull's field was wet. Their feet were drenched. They went through the woods and, sitting on the river bank, took off their shoes and stockings to dry them in the occasional sun that pierced the clouds. He had a moment of dread at the idea of an intimate revelation of her stripped feet. He remembered something D'Annunzio had written of the fall when the grace of a silk stocking was removed. But when he saw them he gave a kind of sigh. At the end of their urn-like stems, they lay in such innocence upon the ground, extravagantly arched, marmoreal.

He wanted to caress them, but he could not. A shyness held him back.

"They give us half rations of beauty," he said, "but they have relented. . . . This is enough."

He did not care so much for her rather shapeless sandals lying rude and wet beside the full rations of beauty.

She began to say the Psalm:

"The Lord is my shepherd: I shall not want. He maketh me to lie down in green pastures: he leadeth me beside the still waters . . . Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil. Under the greenwood tree who loves to lie with me and turn his merry note unto the sweet bird's throat."

"I sometimes think that you are a divine being," he said. "I mean a creature of some other order than ours . . . in all probability there are wells of simplicity and benevolence in you that would make us aghast. . . . 'Pure' is the word . . . you are pure of something. Perhaps you are pure of everything. . . . Your simplicity is a kind of sanctity. Do you know what I mean?"

"No, but that doesn't matter," she replied. "I hear the tune of your voice. I like——"

"I don't want you to interrupt me to like anything about me," he said impatiently. "I don't want you to recall me to anything that is myself. . . . That's the crassness of human interchange . . . of people who are what is called, 'in love.' . . . The one that happens to be the object of life-rousing contemplation is always destroying the revealing intensity of that act by throwing the contemplator back upon himself. . . . The King should not disturb the cat in his look with 'Sweet Puss!' "

"You are not the only one who has a worshipping machine inside you," said she. "I say there is nothing remarkable for the vocabulary of flutes but you."

"Now you've baffled me!" he complained. "You make some sort of wild image of myself rise up between us. . . . I've lost you."

"Don't you like the image, my hearty?"

"I like it well enough," he returned. "But I was not in the vein for it. I was having a vision of extraordinary excellence, and you've smeared it. . . . Oh, your dear befuddled eyes! . . . I say that I am having a vision."

"I feel as if my being were transparent," she said, "and through it you gaze at your vision. I see your hands trimming your lamp of perpetual adoration. . . . To understand your sacrilege you must have come into the world a Catholic, been born in the purple, bred under the Mistress of Magic, inheritor of the rubied vocabulary."

"Then where do I come in?" he inquired.

"Oh, you, you black Protestant, must come in by byways and reproaches."

They kissed, for the first time laughing in the act.

"It's fun to kiss a laugh . . . to feel your mouth corners widen under a kiss," said he. "That's a new one."

"We will remember that in far seas at night," said she, "when the ships are mooing, black bulls bellowing in the dark. . . . I feel like a rose on fire. Weep on me quickly! . . . What shall I do, remembering afterwards in rags . . . remembering how you pampered my heart?"

"There will be no afterwards. . . . What is that letter in your pocket?"

"It is from Charles." She did not show him it. She was silent a moment, and then let out a sigh.

"How far we are from them all!" she said. "Abstemious persons whose presence is penury. . . . There are persons there whose presence is exile."

"I wish they had something in their beans other than tripe and us," said he, glancing toward the town with troubled eyebrows.

"Beans and tripe," she said gaily. "That sounds like Giulietta when she's scolded for it. . . . Slang might be called the Renewed Delight. The fun of cavemen's children, it must have been, contriving words. The charming buffoonery. The new joke of the new word. . . . The game still goes on, and a good job it is, too."

"Oh, you incorrigible wordsmith!" he rejoined. "What had Charles to say? Roasting you about money, the strong man?"

"He must have been a boy from birth," said she.

"Aren't they all?" inquired he.

"He much more. . . . He is Leviathan. I am afraid he will spew me back into the sea. . . . Without doubt he will do me a harm. But meanwhile, you, the hurt, are the saviour of men, according to precedent. . . . You have saved my tattered heart from undivining death. . . . It will return to death with a difference. But don't let my tatters weigh too heavily on your galled shoulders. For a little while I'll sit light, like a chickadee. . . . Up fellows! Braggadocio!

" 'We are the boys that fear no noise
Where the thundering cannons roar!' "

"You are as light as a grenadier on my shoulders," said he. "You didn't tell me what Charles has to say."

"Come one, come all!
This chair shall fly
From its firm base
As soon as I,"

went on Helga. "Up, my bullies! Give 'em a round of iron pills."

He was silent from annoyance.

"Didn't you like those shouts?" she asked. "My husband and my father used to teach us things like that when we were little, we, perched and ranting on chairs."

"Are you going to tell me something about those men?"

"Those men." She fell into her narrow-eyed muse. He stretched himself front down on the grassy bank, withdrawn into the irritation he felt against her and her obstinate mystifications.

His ardours turned coldly back upon themselves. For the moment he could have wished himself well out of this affair. And it was at this inopportune moment she began making two words over and over, not speaking aloud, hardly moving her lips, but reiterating again and again two soundless words.

"What are you saying?" he asked.

"Something I must never say." She had stopped what she was doing, suddenly distending her half-closed eyes.

Then, without warning, a belated understanding came to him of what the unuttered words had been:

"Keep me. Keep me. Keep me. Keep me." He felt a slight panic . . . trapped in this affair, past any reach of his intention, with this obstinate, secret, voluble, outlandish woman.

They were silent. Each plucked a blade of grass and tasted it, then slowly tore it into shreds. By and by she gave him one of her furtive looks. He stirred uneasily where he lay and spoke of what was going on in the mirror of the river.

She put on her shoes and stockings, and he followed her example. Then she got up and moved a few steps away, crouching her shoulders.

"I'm off," she said, "we're not doing so well now . . . poor little fellows whimpering with the cold."

He let her go, still sitting on the ground tying his shoe laces. They were not to meet again for some time.

CHAPTER XXXIV CONTAINS AN ULTIMATUM OR THE GOBLIN

If his wife goes away, who will sew on my lover's buttons?" said Giulia.

She sometimes permitted herself hazardous little jokes when she was alone, and had a good time over it for a moment or two with nothing to show but the faintest possible smile.

She would have liked to tell this one to Windsor. But he was too easily startled. She thought, "He is so insanely refined . . . and so am I." She sighed.

Charles had just told her that Sylvia was in such a way that she might *foutre le camp*. Not that Charles had put it so. He did not fall into French with impunity. He had said, "The little idiot has a bright idea. She's going to beat it."

"To what bourne will she beat?" Giulia had languidly inquired. Charles had such sources of information.

"She's going to become a nursing sister," said he, with his smile of a horned toad, "to be of greater assistance to the Reverend George."

"What justification will she give us for abandoning the care of her husband?"

"Mrs. Tredegar," said Charles.

"Oh, has Windy gone so far?" inquired Giulia still more languidly.

"Windy hasn't gone at all," returned her husband with conviction. "But Mrs. Tredegar has gone quite a way."

"Has she pounced?" asked Giulia. "Does she mean to carry him off?"

"She can't get that fellow," said Charles easily. "He isn't the boy for a hubbub. . . . The heat isn't getting you down, is it?" he asked, turning away to hide the helpless solicitude in his careful eyes.

"I'm fit as a fiddle," she returned.

"Well, see you keep that way. . . . I'm going down to jack up Mrs. Tredegar on her finances. She's doubled the pay of all her retainers, including Mrs. Chick; with a gratuity to the farmer's wife on the hill."

"Why that?" asked Giulia.

"Afraid they'll tell on her, I suppose."

He went out, and in a few moments Giulia saw him going down the slopes toward The River House. As he never walked except when he played golf, he carried a golf-stick with him and propelled a ball as he went.

When he reached a certain spot he meant to loft it wantonly into the river. As this was not an orthodox game, he thought he might give himself that pleasure. His pockets bulged with other balls.

But there was no look of wantonness or pleasure on his massive "undershot" face as he went slowly down the long terraces, ponderous as a moving mountain.

He was thinking hard about Mrs. Tredegar. A few weeks ago at Mrs. Worthington's there had been a curious conversation. It was late, and the guests were about to depart when Helga, looking at Windsor, said:

"Well, let's strap on our crosses and leave each other."

"I don't know whether you're a maniac or a martyr," said Mrs. Worthington, helping Helga on with her cloak.

"Don't you see she's got nail holes like St. Francis in her hands and feet?" Charles had returned. Then Mrs. Tredegar had turned to him with one of her narrow looks:

"You know by virtue of your own stigmata."

"What the devil do you mean?" he had exclaimed, and she rejoined:

"There, there, you let my nails alone and I'll let yours."

He had felt himself rather glaring at her, and Helga had added, Mrs. Worthington having turned away, throwing her eyes to heaven:

"Come now, a dapper, well groomed man like you would be uncomfortable with a dripping decoration for himself. . . . It doesn't matter for the dirty little saints who aren't careful of their linen."

Then, still feeling him ill at ease, she concluded:

"That was a random shot, my dear. It would bag anybody the world over. . . . Though Franciscan hearts are scarce, nails aren't. All the unrepentant thieves wear the same distinction."

Now, Mrs. Tredegar was standing by the old gigantic lilac hedge when Charles reached The River House. He had forgotten to send his ball into the river; in fact, he had left it lying by the path far behind him. His great attentive face had a look of pain.

A long steady swath of wind had lifted from the river and was stroking the shoulders of the trees. The hemlocks stood freshly green. The leaves of the deciduous trees clattered a little, already dried with the heat of ending summer.

"Those are Christian trees," said Mrs. Tredegar. "They strip themselves every winter and repent, but the firs are pagans. They have nothing to repent of."

"Come in here, I want to talk to you," said Charles, leading her into the house.

"You've got to get out of this," he said, standing in front of her, too big for the room, too big for anything. And then he told her a curious thing.

"I don't mean they've ever been lovers in the ordinary sense," he ended. "You understand that thoroughly, don't you?"

He levelled the extraordinary power of his small eyes upon her. "There are all kinds of loves, and not all of them reduce to the formula of a French novel."

"I knew this was an angelic place," said Helga at last. "But I did not think any strange thing could happen here."

"Oh, we're strange, all right," he agreed, "now you've got it straight in your nut, haven't you? Nothing on God's earth is going to interfere with Giulia . . . she likes fine things and she damned well ought to have them. Windsor's the best we've got. He has everything."

"Heart, too?" said Helga, profoundly thoughtful. "I mean, heart for *you?*"

"Oh, he's got a lot of heart for me," returned Charles. "But he can't help himself. She took him because she damned well needed him. She would have died without him. . . . She practically did die when she realized she was actually married to me. Why shouldn't she? Any woman of her sort would. . . . Even you couldn't stay married to a horned toad. So I stopped her being married . . . right after I saw the murderous mistake. . . . We were divorced in secret, with as good a divorce in one sense as any court of law could give. She had a perfect moral right. . . . Not that she ever used it. You understand that?"

Again he fixed her with the terrific will of his look.

"And she's going to keep him because she needs him. I'll see to that. . . . It's been awfully hard on him. I mean, he worries a good deal about me. Always did. In the beginning I thought he was going to croak with it. . . . I make it as easy as I can. . . . Are you astounded?"

"I am astounded at your terrible heart," she gasped out, covering sudden tears with her hands.

"You mean you *like* it?" he asked with a hard peering as if to penetrate her hands. She took them down, obedient to his will.

"Oh, I like it. I like it."

"You have no right to like it!" he said sternly. "You ought to have more moral sense."

"Oh, yes," she conceded, "I suppose there are people who would think what you have done an immoral thing."

"It *was* immoral!" he thundered. "I've damned my immortal soul."

He walked away from her over the groaning boards of the old floor.

"I'm not like the rest of you," he hurled back, "I'm a religious man. Yet, to cover things up, I've let the neighbours think that I'm an unfaithful husband . . . that there's been a woman there in Boston for years."

"Well," said she, "perhaps there is no soul more saved than the one that is damned for selfless love. . . ."

"Don't think for a minute my soul is saved, my girl!"

"What do you want me to do?" she asked.

"I want you not to take him away from Giulia."

"But you see," she returned, "I am in love for the first time in my life."

"Just the same after what I've told you?" he shrewdly inquired.

"Yes."

"Doesn't it make any difference?" he asked.

"Yes, but not enough difference to stop me."

"Well," he said with an enormous sigh, throwing out his vigorous hands, palms upward, "just look into it with all your wits about you, and measure your love against mine. . . . And see which looks the heaviest."

She gazed at him with widened eyes as, putting his great hands in his pockets, he went on:

"What I want to say is, if you see yours don't stand up against mine, be a good girl and take yourself out of this . . . I'm just laying it before you as man to man . . . Don't spoil what I've paid so heavy for. . . . Don't—don't break Giulia." He paused, and finished with a slight trembling in his raucous voice:

"That is, don't ruin us unless you can honestly say you've got a bigger love than mine."

"Greater than yours hath no man." She walked away from him with her crouching attitude, wringing her hands, "But oh, my dear, how have you been able to bear . . . Haven't you got any of that thing they call jealousy?"

"Haven't you?"

"I don't know yet," she returned. "I'm not a practised lover."

"Call it what you like," he said. "You know you're poisoned."

"Well, I have taken up burning. I suffer . . . I shall have to find out all the ways. . . . Do they know what you've done for them?"

"Not he," Charles replied, "or he couldn't swallow it. . . . Nobody on earth has any idea what Giulia knows."

He mopped his forehead and brushed his hand over his sandy hair, trying as usual to smooth down the spikes. He laid a packet of papers and money on the table.

"Well, are you going to get out of here and leave us alone?" She did not answer, and he went on:

"You can get over it. *You* can get over anything. But I can't . . . Besides, my dear, it would have been no go. A man like Windy could never have stood for what's behind you. He hasn't got the guts."

Mrs. Tredegar became so motionless she hardly looked alive but for the blue stone of her eyes just gleaming through the narrow apertures.

"It wouldn't make any difference to *me,*" he went on, "I look like a toad, but I understand women."

"There is something jewel-like about your eye," said she vaguely. "But the rest of you is too resistant for a toad . . . you are more like a saintly rhinoceros."

He gave his loud raucous laugh and went on:

"I got you from the beginning, in spite of all you had to say. Other people naturally thought you were a pretty odd fish, but I knew there was no harm in you. . . . In fact, I don't mind saying you're one of the best in the girl-business. God, I meant that about the nail holes in your hands and feet! You're a cut or two above Giulia in some ways. . . . But I don't allow anybody to spike Giulia. Not if you were an archangel. I've kept them off for nearly fifteen years."

"Kept off the archangels?" asked she absently.

"Kept off the nosey swine."

He got his cap, took his golf-stick from the table, and again came toward the motionless Mrs. Tredegar.

"Now, think over that matter, and think one way, and think quick. . . . I'd rather you'd go kindly. It'd be hard on me to have to make you go."

"If I go, I believe I will die," said she almost inaudibly.

"Die then."

Her energy slowly returned. She seemed to float to a surface of activity, up through depths of inertia.

"I don't jump immediately at the crack of your whip," she said thoughtfully. She seemed about to slip through his fingers like quicksilver, but he shovelled her up.

"Why not? I'm darned well determined."

"Oh, yes," she returned, "but you are not angry. I am afraid of anger, not of determination."

"Well, I could pretty dog-gone quick give you a sample of that, too."

He scrutinized her carefully for a long moment, then resumed in a voice if possible more raucous than before, though it was pitched sepulchrally low:

"Look here, you've overlooked a few facts in this case. You know perfectly well your cheery old uncle Llewelyn left me not only the care of your affairs, but also those of Wandering Willie."

Some tissue of resistance seemed to give way in Mrs. Tredegar. Out of the collapse, her eyes widened into a stare, the irises revealed in a complete round like those of a cat, terrified and alert.

"You mean?"

"Yes, I mean. To cut a long story short, unless you make yourself scarce, and do it with a snap . . . our Willie gets his jail . . . at last."

"You *know!* . . . But Llewelyn never told you!" she gasped.

"I don't always have to have a diagram," he returned. "When I'm feeling fit I can do a little sum without chewing the slate pencil all day long."

She straightened herself, took a long breath, and held it like a diver.

"Where is he? I'll go to him again."

"That's just what he doesn't want," said Charles. "Here, don't forget your envelope. When you've lost your reticule as usual, there's the cable service as usual to little Charlie who slumbers not nor sleeps."

"I'll be off to my mountain," said she almost inaudibly. "I have no level."

"Go where you like, my poor kid. I'll get you a nice ship." He put his enormous hand on her shoulder. "Everybody's got to lie down for love . . . one way or another."

She still stood fumbling with what she had in her hands, her aspect anything but leonine.

"I am gone down," she said. "I have no room."

"God!" he thought. "The big girl looks like a beggar in the door."

"Snap out of it!" he said, like the slamming of a door, and strode off not to see that face of Ishmael slowly turning away.

Some time afterward he told old Mr. Brewster (sitting side by side on a bank thick with asters) that he had had two blows in his time, and he was a dead man. In each case, he said, the mortal stroke was the sight of the head of a woman turning rather slowly away.

When Charles had gone out of Mrs. Tredegar's house she stood quietly in the middle of the parlour looking at the floor, her shoulders crouched almost up to her ears, as if she were being flogged on the back. Then there bounded in from the region of the stables a tear-stained, frantic Giulietta. She was winded from running and from grief, and straw hung in her hair and down her dress. Finding her father there, she had hidden in an outhouse till he had gone.

"You can't go off with Windy!" she cried out with a fresh burst of tears. All her little imperturbability was crumbled in her passion. She fell almost fainting on the carved sofa.

Mrs. Tredegar was just able to inquire why she should say this.

"Sylvia told Giulia, and Giulia's . . . all shot to pieces! As soon as Dad went down here, Sylvia came and told her you were going. . . . And when she was gone Giulia went wild . . . she began to die . . . and the worst of it is, I always meant to marry him myself. . . . Giulia told me to ask you not to . . . Dad mustn't know . . . to ask you not to run away with Windy because——"

"Why?"

"Because he's my father!"

CHAPTER XXXV THE GOBLIN DISAPPEARS

Mrs. Tredegar was gone. The town had been discussing her for a week with renewed ardour. Some were wondering if Windsor were going to follow her. Others averred that if this were so, he would not be sitting beside Giulia's sick bed every day. Giulia had had a *crise de nerfs,* but was quite herself again except for a bit of pallor.

Still, she did not come down when Mrs. Worthington and Mrs. Copeland dropped in on Saturday afternoon, their houses spick and span behind them, their spirits socially inclined.

Charles received them, dispensing tea to Mrs. Copeland and a cocktail to Mrs. Worthington, who wanted to be a little wicked, as it rested her from maternal uprightness. Giulietta was off to her girls' camp in the mountains. She was not so buxom as usual. She had wept at parting from her mother.

"Don't you think Mrs. Tredegar was bad for us, Charles?" said the right little, tight little woman. "Didn't she mess us up?"

"Of course she was bad for us, because she's everything we can't get," he replied.

"Aren't we the gettingest little crowd that ever coagulated?"

"Could you give us a few instances of what she has that we haven't?" asked Mrs. Copeland firmly.

"No." Charles was looking almost larger than ever. He seemed to have an inkling of this, for he was going about on tiptoe, which seemed to shake the tables and china even worse.

"Here comes Michael," said Mrs. Worthington. "He's bringing flowers. Mrs. Tredegar ordered him to carry them as long as they lasted, every day, to Mrs. Chick, Rosemary, and Giulia. . . . He *is* a funny-looking fellow! And she was awfully funny about him. She said he was kindly disposed toward her but apt to be a little rough. That is, if he was dusting he might *par hazard* dust her too. . . . She seemed to view it as very important that he had a weakness for her, though she said the evidence was slight, as there was little or no variety in his 'facial predicament.' . . . Facial predicament is the word."

Michael was now visible in the hall, bearing the flowers of late summer in his arms. Charles offered to carry those destined for Giulia up to her room.

"Herself was after telling me to be sure to take them to all the ladies in person myself," said Michael. "That is, if they're in a visible condition, sir."

"Why?" called Mrs. Copeland. "It seems rather odd, except perhaps in the case of Mrs. Chick."

"Well, herself was always great with her jokes, ma'am, being far from patterned on her old uncle who was enough to make you pine for a good laugh, if at nothing livelier than your own dead grandmother. . . . But her idea in this case was for me to see the ladies regular with my own eyes to make sure, as she says, that they was safe and sound."

Charles waved him up the stairs.

"She leaves poetry behind her on the town," said Mrs. Worthington. "I adore the woman myself, even if she *has* a way of monkeying with husbands. . . . But haven't *we* poetry too, Charles? Aren't we fond of verses, art, music, Nature, etcetera?"

"No."

"Well, I admit the men don't read anything. But we poor females . . . do witness our literary clubs in the winter and intellectuals simply pouring in to lecture us to boot."

"The trouble is you read together," said Charles. "You have to sneak it to be right. It's like love . . . nobody here but Windy and me ever reads in secret."

"But isn't Windy up there reading to poor Giulia now?"

"It's not quite so bad when there are only two," returned Charles. "Next best to being alone. As being in love is next best to not being."

"And the Goblin, is she a sneaker, too? Is she like love?"

"Yes."

"I think you're getting in love with her too," said Mrs. Copeland firmly.

"Oh, no, I've got mine."

"Your what?"

"My love."

He went out into the hall where a servant was turning back from someone at the door.

"A lot you have, if you mean Giulia," said Mrs. Worthington *sotto voce*.

"Poor dear!" said Mrs. Copeland. "That was awfully touching about Windy and he being the only ones that did something or other in secret."

There was a ragged boy at the door who it seemed had come from ten miles away on an unsaddled horse, looking for Windsor. Charles sent the servant upstairs to call him from Giulia's sitting room. He himself conversed with the boy while he waited, in tones not audible in the drawing room.

But as Windsor descended, he returned to the ladies with a rapidity one would not have expected in such a heavy man.

Now they saw that Windsor was preparing to go away with the boy. They thought they would get it out of Charles afterwards, though, indeed, one couldn't be quite so sure of getting things out of Charles. Then, they would get it out of Windsor later.

"When is Mrs. Tredegar coming back?" asked Mrs. Copeland.

"Mrs. Tredegar is never coming back," replied Charles, unaware that Windsor had stopped at the drawing room door to bid them good-bye.

The latter omitted the good-bye and went hastily down the path to his car with the strange boy.

CHAPTER XXXVI THE TORMENTED HERO RECEIVES AN APPALLING REVELATION FROM THE STRANGER

Windsor found Carmarthen in the gaunt room of a farmhouse ten miles away among neglected fields. The boy who had been sent for him was the child of the farmer.

The sick man lay long and straight under a fortunately faded patchwork quilt. A cat was asleep against his side. A basin half concealed on the floor beneath the bed showed red contents. The same arresting colour stained sundry cloths that lay heaped on the table with a china pitcher, some cups and bottles, and a book laid open, revealing Latin pages, the Office for the Dead.

The instant Windsor caught sight of Carmarthen he felt an incomprehensible affection and desire to ameliorate his pain. The impression of something well known, familiar, and kind between them had maintained. The shock of the dead dog and the dubious appearance at Helga's house had not dispelled it.

As the visitor came in, the sick man had hastily hidden the stained cloths, poured and gulped down some brandy, bracing himself for the encounter, and began as if in haste to tell his tale in ejaculatory sentences. Little by little he became more calm, resuming his habitual demeanour of extreme gentleness and dignity.

The extraordinary beauty of his head, the perfect cleanliness and decorum of his person, made what he said seem more unreal. There were no repellent indications of a man in illness other than that bowl of scarlet under the edge of the bed, which was highly unsettling to Windsor. Carmarthen was like a fastidious gentleman of an earlier time receiving another in a moment of repose for an agreeable Heraclitean discourse upon poets, perhaps, or the sweet expeditions of scholars.

"I must, in the rage of the repulse, have given him a furious thrust." He continued, "My brother's body crumbled, as it were, over the cliff with a fall of crumbled stones."

It was a strange tale to have been told so rapidly, shot like a sudden gun in a quiet scene. Windsor was incapable of a word. He sat with teeth exposed as if he were receiving a black sacrament in his mouth, growing lividly pale as when his precarious stomach was ill at ease.

"The lights of the city were beginning to appear across the dark river below the Palisades where we had been walking," Carmarthen went on, "The brink where we had stood was very high, so even the tall towers were low, as if an eagle had been looking down at them in flight. My brother David and I had come there by the ferry, leaving little Dagmar in the poor rooms alone. She was our elf-housekeeper. . . . She was something more than twelve years old. Her mother, Dagmar, the Helen of this Troy, had died years before. My brother's other daughter, Eleanor, had gone to the convent in Ireland from which she never returned, definitely called, a little later, to the religious life.

"We three lived alone, like three church mice in a holy hole . . . in those upper rooms of an old house near the river, where the first Dagmar had left us. . . . We could not go away from them. Her bed, her garments, her innocent impedimenta were there . . . her little shoes in a row, until the children got big enough to wear them. . . . And there she grew again . . . the same flower . . . again where the flower had fallen. . . ."

The narrator lifted himself abruptly and leaned toward his listener.

"*The same!* You understand. . . . The monstrous thing was happening day by day, in those haunted rooms. The little Dagmar was *becoming* her mother. . . . David and I trembled like horses at that voice returned . . . those blue looks from narrow eyes, that resumed self . . . that resolutely retaken-up identity. Llewelyn came and looked. . . . He heard her . . . he looked. 'Never let me see that again!' he said, and went away howling. When the children had last visited him, the little Dagmar had not yet *achieved* that appalling resemblance.

"We three had come from Wales, where a playful father had tossed houses, lands, learning to the winds. Playful fathers leave grave sons. . . . Llewelyn was the eldest of the three damned brothers in love with the one pale woman. She and her father were on the same ship when we came to America. I, the third, was only a boy, not yet having sloughed off the exacerbating disability of boyhood. But I was man enough to be poisoned—poisoned as deep as they. I never dared to say I was their rival at heart, poor puling adolescent, *hors de combat*. And there was combat. I'm not the only fanged one of the three. Poor Llewelyn snarled over her like a bear.

"But the strong woman goes to the gentle . . . or the cursed. So it seems to me. I don't know women . . . I can't dribble platitudes about them . . . except those two Dagmars . . . that *one* Dagmar. God knows I was cursed enough, and gentle enough most of the time . . . and she did give me seven kisses in all . . . careful not to let the others see . . . and devilish careful not to let me think them full-womaned kisses . . . child to child . . . and those little Danish words . . . '*Lille broder! Lille broder!*'

"Her father died . . . the old biologist, insectivorous, we called him, poring over any available organism. . . . She was alone in America . . . with us. David got her . . . David the mild . . . the ardent mildness.

"Off shot Llewelyn. I stayed. Nothing could oust me. And they wanted me. They did not know any better than to want me. They nursed me between them. I, the innocent, stayed, eating her looks for daily bread. . . . We three. Then the two woman-babies, she over them with eyes of blue opal, colour of pale seas in Northern nights.

"Then she, dead, never again seeing Denmark nor anything but us. Then, the one little daughter Eleanor, portrait of mild David, gone to Ireland and mysteries. We three again . . . again a child Dagmar, slowly and inevitably resuming her intermitted self. She was twelve years old and almost the completed avatar—when Llewelyn came and said, 'Never let me see that again.' Then he shot off to make more money. He had that way. David and I did not. We made shift . . . Latin teacher, librarian . . . Llewelyn fell in with Crawford, this ponderous townsman of yours who knows about money. Llewelyn, nursing his unremitting love-sulk, learned about money too, and sometimes helped David and me with the care of our Dagmars. He later helped me to elusive voyages when I had told him of the event. And at the last gave that house to Dagmar."

"You told your elder brother you had thrown the other down the cliff?" brought out Windsor, as the sick man paused, coughing and pressing a cloth over his mouth.

"I ran to Llewelyn at once to help me escape, leaving the little Dagmar for two days . . . near the ships . . . immediately after the marriage."

"What marriage?"

"My marriage to Helga, of course."

Windsor leaped up as if a snake had touched him with its coil.

"Then who was Dagmar?" he cried out.

"She has both names," returned the other. "We called her by her mother's when she was little. When I think of her as little, that name comes to my tongue . . . quaint trick of correlated memories. When I think of the later Helga I name her so."

"Then in God's name, what is *your* name?" gasped Windsor. "You said it was Carmarthen."

"Oh, yes, so I did. I had forgotten. That was my mother's—*won't* you sit down?—My name is Owen Tredegar."

"*You!*" Windsor ripped out. "You, her father's brother! . . . You married the child . . . you, who had killed her father!"

"I thought you had caught my drift," complained the other, throwing his head back irritably upon the pillow.

"Your drift!" The infuriated visitor went to the farthest side of the room, his face buried, his eyes closed, under the pressure of his palms. The sick man apologetically stroked the cat, which had stirred at his action.

"There, there, sweet Puss! . . . He killed me first. He took the mother when he knew it was killing me. He towered over my young disadvantage and took her in a frolic.

"And when the new Dagmar came . . . when Helga loomed, he saw me looking. . . . And out there, on the cliff . . . We had been walking and talking about old legends, full of love and awe . . . out there, when I took him by the shoulders—where I used to ride when I was little—and said, 'Dagmar has come back, for my sake this time. This is my legend now—full of love and awe. Give her to me,' he turned on me as if I were half foolish villain and half villainous fool. . . . He said, 'Helga isn't going to have ghost-love when she loves.' Then, seeing my mistake, I detached the living Helga from the dead Dagmar. I pleaded single love, unghosted, the first.

"But when he spoke I saw he had said that not to touch on the true cause of the repulsion in his eyes. He meant to spare me knowledge of what he felt at finding me . . . ready to vault the . . . well, the barrier of consanguinity. I tell you . . . it is maddening to see in friendly eyes, fraternal eyes adored from childhood, what I saw in his!

"I held him by the shoulders. There on the height the sky was coloured still: down in the steep river it was nearly night. . . . He pushed my hands off. He knew my disposition . . . and by habit he was saintly patient with me . . . handling my irascibility with such care . . . such carefulness . . . soothing my frenzies. . . . But now, he let it sting up through his voice . . . the unbelievable repulsion that he felt, the insane, sudden . . . *disgust*.

" 'You couldn't have the mother,' he said, 'and I'd make a damned quick end of you before you got the daughter.'

"I saw him imagining in me some hideous passion that had lurked there in the house . . . had been lurking there all the time with greedy watching. First preying, with eyes, on the mother. And now upon the child with brigand love, outside the law. He was revolted by the idea to the last extremity."

"And you? *You* didn't feel what he felt—nothing of it?" Windsor held back the words "You swine."

"Perfect love rides over . . . was my argument," replied Tredegar. "An ordinance of nothing. Convention of papier-mâché. Empty inhibition. No biological foundation for that priest-made prejudice. . . . Now the penance . . . long . . . long! Penance without penitence. How can I repent and keep my hoard! . . . the booty memory."

"I don't know what your religion says of that relation," began Windsor, and finished interiorly, "All I know is I loathe you—you are bayonetting me."

"Well he pronounced the word," said Tredegar. "I held the image of the beloved, the holy child, in my mind as in a tabernacle. . . . Innocent it seemed to me then. Innocent, unendurable love . . . endured! Long endured. . . . Reaching back to the earlier Dagmar with exquisite pure hands to my own almost childhood . . . the colour of pure opals on pale seas in Northern nights. . . . Consecrated. . . . Long endured. . . . The uncouth word! . . . His exact phrase was, 'You've killed my love for you, you fratricide, you damned incestuous profaner of altars!' "

"And it was then?"

"I must have thrust much harder than I knew."

The guest walked twice the length of the room.

"You seem to take it easily," he said.

"I've taken it too long not to take it easily. Do you imagine what a man lives on can keep the element of horror? Stale horror, stale remorse, the pang in memory, have long ceased for me: the vivid terror that used to make me afraid to sleep. . . . The dreams full of exasperated haste in which I would be fruitlessly trying to save him—to catch him back—hanging over the abyss with his collar or a fold of a tearing sleeve in my clutch . . . falling with him. . . . No, I wind to the close with no more appetite for grief, no more power of regret than there is blood in a Pharaoh."

There was a timid knock, and the door opened hesitatingly far enough to admit a small female head with a peaked nose and pale bulging eyes. These features belonged to the wife of the farmer in whose house Tredegar was lying. She beckoned with a small clawlike calloused hand to Windsor and whispered:

"Tell the gentleman, if he wants to die, there's a nice hospital a little way down the river. Just what a gentleman would enjoy, and doctors and nurses in droves to ease him off. . . . If I hadn't thought he was a living gentleman I'd never have rented him the room . . . my best room, and he should have conducted himself as such . . . but cantankerous! . . . Feed him and he gives you fits, though the softest spoken gentleman you ever saw by nature, and kind to dumb animals, though I've never been known to have a cat on the bed. . . ."

The communication was interrupted by a choking sound from the sick man, at which the head immediately withdrew.

"Persuade that woman not to intrude that comic mask into this ritual! The farce follows. . . . Avaunt, Sly-boots! Obstruct not the light of this darkness. . . . *Illumináre his, qui in ténebris et in umbra mortis sedent.* . . ."[1]

"Did you go down to the bottom of the cliff?" asked Windsor, again approaching the bed.

"There was no way of going down," replied the other. "In the morning I got a boat. . . . There was nothing there."

"No sign?"

"Nothing. There was a big wind in the night . . . the river had been running high. There were weeds and straw high up on the rocks."

After a pungent pause Tredegar began again. "It was all in the accident . . . the situation of the ground on which we stood. The accident of the ground. If there had been ground, where would have been my mischief? The rage the same. If he had fallen on solid extending ground . . . We had wrestled often . . . bowled each other over . . . rolled in the dust. If there had been ground . . . he would have been up in my arms. . . . I was always his little one, his darling, his 'fretful porkentine,' he used to say, hugging hard. . . . He would have known. He would have *waited* to understand me, if there had been ground. He would have absolved us both, if there had been ground."

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[1] To light them that sit in darkness and in the shadow of death.

"But nothing prevented you from marrying the child!" said Windsor, no longer able to listen. "What did you tell her?"

"I told her I had killed a man that tried to rob me. To rob me . . . true enough. And that she must help me hide. That her father had gone suddenly to see Llewelyn . . . that we couldn't wait till he returned. She, she alone must take me away and hide me. '*Oh, I will hide you . . . I will hide you, Sweet Fellow.*' " (Windsor shuddered. Helga's chain rattled faintly inside his clothing on his naked breast.) " 'He will follow. . . . I have written to him,' I would tell her, 'and he has replied,' '*Let me see the letter, let me see his darling letter.*' . . . 'The letter is not here. He will follow . . .', '*Oh, he will follow, he will follow soon and help me hide you.*' . . . Then I told her her father wanted us to marry. . . ."

Windsor interrupted with an oath. After an interval he asked hoarsely,

"How did she look?"

"At first the little face all startled," Tredegar replied. "Then she laughed and jumped and clapped her hands."

Windsor felt a sickness. He saw Helga diminish to a child. She lost stature; she grew small and light. She lifted up from her littleness a different face . . . yet the same. . . . No, he cannot see it . . . it blurs. Invention boggles. Little girls skipped before him. Jolly little birds, all safe and twittering . . . save one.

"How was her hair? Short? Long?"

Tredegar stirred but did not open his eyes. Presently he said hardly above his breath:

"All down her back. Colour of a fawn. Stuff disposed to curling. . . ."

"And on her forehead?"

"Shorter, lighter coloured elves. . . . There was no scar. . . . She put it all up in a nest when we were married. Lengthened her dress. '*Must be eighteen to be married. You'll see. I'll look* *eighteen. No niece. Wide, wadded, wagging, wedded woman.'* Then she began taking care of me. She picked up the things I forgot half across the globe." (Windsor remembered that "Don't forget your hat.") "And she saved me with babble. No one could get through it at me.

"We never stopped our endless going. Italy, first, the Dolomites. Then always running . . . into the East. And she always babbling. How could she have known that people in our situation always go gently, unobtrusively . . . not to leave much track. She fooled them by leaving track. We pretended she was my daughter till she got tall enough, that babbler. She used to say, 'When Father comes he'll help me to hide you properly . . . more gentlemanly. I hide you like a popinjay.' Then, as I had arranged with Llewelyn, came the letter from him announcing that David had died. She did not babble for a while. . . ." Tredegar gave a sound of suffering.

"Can I do something with your pillows?"

Putting aside a deep disinclination, Windsor lifted Tredegar and braced him higher with the pillows.

"Don't bedevil the puss!" said the sick man irritably.

Windsor watched him adjusting himself to the new attitude to see if he had done well. He replaced the somnolent cat against his flank. The virtue of the act gave him a momentary unexpected impulse of compassion. He meditated some possible comforting utterance. But the stark ruin before him forbade it with his aspect of grisly rooted *malaise*. It would have been like trying to make a skeleton comfortable in an armchair, the inconsolable bones.

Windsor put back the rich hair that let its waves fall forward, deeply brown save for the two wings of silver at the sides. The whole head, save for these, was dark as a Moor's against the pillow.

"How did you get this scar on your forehead?" Windsor asked with the fleeting humanity of his mood.

"I made it with a stone. . . . And here." Tredegar opened his silk jacket and exposed the cicatrice of another wound on his left breast.

"One for Cain. . . . One for the incestuous heart."

Windsor definitely saw a rough shirt of sackcloth under the silk. He drew back in disgust.

"I am old Bloody-beak, a carrion crow," replied the other faintly. "A gentleman of private means. Oh, private!"

He had another fit of coughing. When he was composed again he said:

"You must realize that Helga's education has been conveyed mostly by word of mouth. You mustn't ask too much." He spoke of the difficulty of having books for those hurtling about the world.

As she had said on the ship's deck gliding in to Singapore at dawn, "You can't fish books from the bottom of the speechless sea."

"Of course, I led her a preposterous life. She was Antigone. Nearly fifteen years of it. . . . I had always been a man more of books than of affairs. I've never known very much of how things proceed in the world. At any rate, I fancied I was pursued. . . . The time-honoured *idée fixe* of murderers. . . .

"At any rate, if any wanderer looked at us twice we were off. We were expert as foxes, and I, at least, was dangerous. . . . She was terribly afraid of me. . . . I would have released her long ago . . . even though it accelerated my death . . . as it has done. But to whom could I release her? You don't see such a wild bride brought home to a usual proper nest by a proper man."

He turned an inquiring eye on Windsor.

"Do you mind that infinitesimal moustache?"

The guest only bit his lip.

"It's an odd thing to ask about, I know . . . as some jaunty little birds have a touch of a tuft, or as kittens are set off with three or four little sprays for an eyebrow . . . or as there is a silky down in the calyxes of certain flowers. . . . Don't you think it's rather charming?"

"I've never noticed it," replied the surly guest. "There may be a faint shadow."

"Yes, a shadow thrown upward from the wing-sweep of her lip. A wild wing, patient." Windsor groaned. Tredegar continued.

"Her level eyebrows give a dart upward at the outer ends as if they waved their tails: almost as erect as the tails of kittens. With her maturity, there was that feathery thickening of the eyebrows, a darkening of the gold in the hair and the appearance of that slight shadow above the lip. I watched my woman grow. . . . I was always afraid they'd mind her tongue . . . when first I began to teach her as a child, there was the difficulty. She'd put it all into her own tongue. She'd tongue it herself until the book wouldn't have known itself from Abracadabra. . . . She was always watching and babbling when I was wary of certain travellers; she'd say: 'Don't be afraid, I've got a lynx in my head and a little red lion in my mouth.' And she loved me. She used to say, 'Are you loved enough? Are you loved enough?' "

Windsor swore under his breath. The voice went on:

"From the time when the mother Dagmar would be comforting the other baby Eleanor in the night and put the bundle that was Helga into my bed. . . . When I told the little creature that I had killed a man, she said, 'Well, Sweet Fellow, you must have been hard pushed.' . . ."

Windsor, straddling a chair near the sick man, his arms folded on the back, clenched his hands and paled. Even "Sweet Fellow" and "Are you loved enough?"!

"The gift of Llewelyn's house solved the problem," continued the other. "A hearth for her. Friends. Safety. Release from me. I drove her away from me. . . . Then her letters telling me of her being caught by you. . . . Ariel, she called you. . . . She scalded me to death. . . . We always gave each other the scalding truth. And what I wanted and hated most had arrived—the man. I knew I couldn't last much longer. I shortened the time by coming to this abominable country. I must have a look at you."

He lifted himself, turned his great gray eyes toward his guest and gave him a long scrutiny from the shadow of their caves.

"Well?" said Windsor, returning the examination, cold as midwinter.

"Well, I wish there were greater indications in your disposition that you can stand the gaff."

Tredegar's gaze sternly deepened.

"Your marriage must be immediately dissolved. You must feed on iron. Make your soul firm with scourging. You must pray."

"You've concluded that I will take her," said Windsor.

"You must take her!"

Tredegar seemed to drain himself of his last strength in the imperial determination of that fiat. He remained an instant longer fixing his guest, as if he were running his will into him with the dagger of that look. Then he succumbed again on the pillow, weakly calling for brandy. Windsor administered it to him, but his voice remained the shadow of his rich, profound, and singular tones.

"You must follow her immediately. This is no occasion for proprieties."

"I have always liked proprieties," said Windsor coldly. "After this, I feel they will be my passion."

The sick man seemed not to hear. "You must never take her back to that town. She must not be with other women. She will always be embarrassing . . . and embarrassed. She is the ugly duckling of tragedy."

"I'm afraid I haven't the talent for an Ishmaelite," said Windsor.

"You must be an Ishmaelite. There is something more I should say to you before you follow her . . . to help you understand her . . . to make her less fabulous to you. . . . We are fabulous, but she's not too fabulous. Listen. . . ."

"The one thing I want to know," cried Windsor: "Did she ever learn that you had killed her father?"

"Just what I was about to tell you. You mustn't *hustle* a dying man. . . . I betrayed it in a dream. I had been mortally afraid of those dreams. . . . But I couldn't resist the ineffable recurrence . . . the sleeping beside her . . . she lying like liquid silver abandoned by the moon. . . ."

Windsor made such an abrupt movement that Tredegar was startled into a fit of coughing. He choked out:

"It was on an island one night . . . palms, black swords scoring the dim beach beyond . . . the surf running and lisping. Then came that week . . . her illness . . . that frightful vomiting. . . ."

The narrator was fortunate at this moment in not happening to turn his gaze on his listener. "It was then she made the wound on her forehead," he said, "with a sharp stone, as I had done. She would have made it on her breast, too, if I hadn't laid my strict command against it. She couldn't stand a shadow of anger in me. . . . Her breast. My God! . . . When at last she was stronger she said, 'Now it is as if I had killed him myself, so I shall be quite at home with it.'

"But the thing happened. The irremediable thing. She took herself away from me. She said her father's dead gorge would rise. . . . Oh, she went on taking care of me. We had been running only five years then . . . the scare had not yet gone stale. . . . She watched out. She watched beside me like the female falcon, the haggard haggard. . . . But she was never mine again. She let me die of starvation. As soon as she did that deed I began to die . . . there was no more occasion for my youth. And she starved beside me. For she loved me. She had loved me since she used to peep and reach her infinitesimal hand through the bars of her cradle to my young face."

Windsor remembered a portrait he had once turned up at The River House. "Great Cæsar's ghost!" he had said. "What a gorgeous boy! Who is it?"

"My brother-husband," Helga had said. There it lay now under his nose, great Cæsar's ghost. That same face, chiselled away into Death's own front.

"I waited, I watched my woman grow." The sick man went on, "The sky-intending rooted infant, the sap-sucker, swelling, hardening, mounting . . . the deliberate, determined tree. . . . And at last, just when that revelation came to stop her . . . the sneak-thief tongue dragging out the secret from that dream. . . . At last she was the full-grown arboreal thing, all leafage . . . my made, my consummated woman. . . . She had come awake . . . don't doubt it . . . alive, aware, closer than a brother. Starvation. . . . It was the gallows-humour of the thing. . . . And yet it was a royal sorrow. . . ."

"You make me sick," burst out Windsor, springing up, past endurance. "You welter in rhetoric like a hippopotamus in his ooze! You toy-murderer! You Punchinello! You wood-and-string assassin!"

Tredegar stopped as if he had been stabbed. The crimson came on his cheek bones. He sat up painfully, propping himself with his arms. His shirt fell open, revealing the coarse fabric beneath. That gaped too and disclosed the scar of the laceration.

"What *are* you, anyway?" cried Windsor. "Something left over from a comic Table Round? By God, I feel like a fool Faust. I think I've raised a joke devil, and he reeks. The worst of it is I feel a loathsome kind of love for you, as if Helga was embedded in you. Your imbecile dignity, your sickening beauty! You are *gaudy*. . . . Your vocabulary and hers . . . both . . . you're an infection! What I say to you scans. It tips my stomach like a rocked boat. I feel my gall spilling. I never talked to any man in this beastly way before . . . but you nauseate . . . when we first met, you said there was nothing palpably indecent about you. . . . There's nothing about you that isn't palpably indecent. . . . What are you anyway, an idiot Druid that forgot to die at the proper time B. C.? I'm bumping over into the inane!"

Windsor stopped, halted in mid-heat by what he saw. Tredegar, still sitting and holding himself erect by his propping arms, seemed to have towered up to an impossible height. His noble face was a mask of Medusan rage.

Windsor was appalled. It flashed upon him that he was seeing what that brother had seen the moment before he fell. In all his decent life he had never beheld such anger. It had the character of epics, and there was madness in it. It was the utter epic mad majesty of anger.

He suddenly thought this power of anger must have been, of old, part of that "divinity that doth hedge a king." And it was a madness. Perhaps it was such a behaviour in a face that quelled wild hordes: the look of early kings, that men believed could slay without an act.

"Rude insolent!" said Tredegar, his deep voice striking out of its previous weakness like a drum. "You are speaking to the man beloved by Helga. The man she has always loved: loves now with undissuadable love. You are a humble follower. You are second to me. . . . To heel, follower!"

Windsor made a movement.

"Don't come near me!"

Windsor paused at the mordant sound, considering how such a note of potent menace could come out of that vanquished man.

"I'm far from coming near you," he said. "I've got to open the window. I haven't a stomach of pig-iron!"

"It will make me cough!" said the other, falling back with a gasp.

"Cough and be damned to you! You've driven me past decency! I tell you I'm outraged!"

"You must not speak to a living man in such a contemptuous fashion," said Tredegar gravely, in what the other had privately called his tone of inhuman gentleness.

"You're not a living man. You're a breathing violation!" Windsor leaned his elbows on the window sill and drank in the air of the orchard outside. Careless, ruddy apples hung among the leaves. One fell to the ground where long grass had been mowed and lay in fragrant heaps.

"Why did you let me speak so?" he presently sighed out.

"I have my own scoundrelly patience," returned the other, relaxing in the bed once more.

"I'd better go," said Windsor. "I'll come to-morrow."

"No, go to her at once. She will be at Cortina—where we were at first. You know where, mounting up from Venice. That's where we were, at first. Tell her I am dead. . . . But write to me how it goes . . . it will not be for long. . . . Tell me everything will be well. Write to me every day. Console me."

Windsor gave a revolted exclamation.

"Christ! Do you think I'll be in the vein? Do you think I'll smear my brains into a diurnal paste to salve your horny hide!"

CHAPTER XXXVII IN WHICH A LADY ASTONISHES A HERO

WINDSOR drove straight to Giulia. Charles was sitting in the porch as if waiting for his return, but his car was churning at the gate, and with only a wave of the hand he drove away.

The other went upstairs and told the whole of Owen Tredegar's story to Giulia. They clung together more than they had done for years. They soothed each other for the horror of it, for the anguish of their pity for Helga. They were together, the two in their profound intimacy against untoward, sorrowful, indignant, atrocious things.

He comforted himself some time with her before he realized that she looked still very frail. He had never seen her with such a dissolving look. He was filled with remorse, but she reassured him with a steadier air. Then at another moment such anger would break out of her as made him blink. It occurred to him that he could never have cared for her if he had known she was capable of this ugly anger. He could not love across a scowl.

"Why didn't you kill that man!"

"Giulia, Giulia!" he would cry out. "He is dying!"

"I would have helped him to die!"

It was rather too much, after all he had suffered at the hands of Tredegar, to have this unguessed aspect of his lady's character leap out at him. It was rather late in the day to have to find out something about Giulia.

"Giulia," he asked, fixing her with his intelligent eyes through which he so rarely cared to pour upon a human being the full power of their intelligence. "Giulia, tell me, as a matter of curiosity, have you absolutely no pity for that man?"

The negative answer was delivered in such a high and piercing note that he felt a little sickened by it. She walked vigorously about the room, repeating Helga's name. He had never seen such action in her delicate, suavely moving body. Her narrow tall heels flashed, wicked, metallic. He thought of the deliberate soft padding movements of Helga's legs, her noble arched feet in their flat strapped sandals.

It occurred to him that he had wished her to wear heeled shoes like other women. Now her fundamental difference from them seemed symbolized in that absence of clicking stilts. There was no metallic click, either, in the action of her brain, no brittle swiftness. He saw her dispassionate face with its meditative long eyes narrowed, its purity from abrupt, unconsidered, unjust showings of emotion. Its noble lack.

It seemed to him the most highly philosophic exhibition that he knew, that thoughtful, slow look, taking no sides for or against the things of life, innocent of *parti pris*. Dispassioned . . . not unimpassioned but dispassioned, the freed initiate, the baccalaureate of passion. The full scholarship. Her most extravagant speech came out of her composure.

"Her feet!" he murmured.

"Yes, what are we going to do without her feet?" cried Giulia. "The coming and going. . . . At the side where there is no strap you look under the arch . . . the sweet place. . . . I tell you, only a woman can fully see another's beauty, can admire enough. . . . Who sees Rosemary? . . . Jackie thinks he does. But how cursory. . . . Does anyone see her like Helga? . . . Does anyone see Helga like me? . . . Attentive scrutiny, pure admiration, subtle love . . . complete sight never to be obfuscated by a touch. . . . Did I say I wanted to kiss her? I only want to look! To know that her beautiful brain is beating there!"

Windsor examined his friend with more curiosity than had cocked his eye for many years in her regard. She was quiet again, resuming her familiar aspect of the reasoning Giulia.

"You see how this man's story explains her up to the hilt?" she was saying. "You said I was a good detective that day when I divined unusual conditions, isolation, Ishmaelitism, the companionship of only one, and that one conversant with books. . . . But only the speculation of a fiend could have divined the rest. . . . That man has robbed Helga of feminine life. He has robbed her of the simple slow knowledge of things as they are that makes the necessary coördination. . . . She will always be surprised and absurd. And all mankind will abuse her. She will always behave like a parachute and talk like a paraclete."

Giulia was able to give a laugh. Windsor thought he had never had any idea of how clever she was. Vaguely it passed across his mind that she had cleverly veiled her hard glittering exceeding cleverness, not to bother him with it. And in that moment Windsor went nearer to a comprehension of this lady than he had ever come or would come again.

"Without this key," she went on, suddenly sombre again, "without the complete knowledge of her fix this man has given, how could we have been able to get the slightest grasp on her—the bizarre spectacle she was, the perpetual bamboozlement to our eyes and ears? . . . How could we possibly have got her . . . without knowing how she came by her incredible ignorance . . . without knowing of her trained secrecy, her fearful stealth, of the hideous grief for her father and the loathsome violation of her childhood. . . . My God, the mediæval horror of it! . . . The grotesque horror of the sackcloth and ashes! The wounds!"

Giulia showed signs of breaking again into excitement. She controlled herself.

"With no leaven . . . with no weight thrown into the balance, from the outside reasonable world . . . alone with that murderous madman, how did she keep her beautiful reason? How was she able to come to us at all?"

"You were right about a woman's attentive scrutiny," said

Windsor, collapsing on the divan, almost overcome with fatigue, and resting his lame arm along the cushions.

"You will be going after her at once?"

He started straight up to his feet again and stared at Giulia as if he had never seen her before. The two pale aquiline faces with their slightly open mouths confronted each other, the long fine teeth gleaming.

"She has gone to Cortina in the Dolomites," he said vaguely. "Charles did not know where she was going."

"Charles did know."

"He told me he did not," said Windsor.

"He knows where she is," said Giulia poignantly. "He knows everything. Llewelyn Tredegar may not have known that Charles had got it all, but if Charles didn't get it all you may eat your hat."

Windsor plunged into speculation. He saw Helga in the red garments given by Charles. He heard Mrs. Worthington conveying the message Charles had sent him, the warning that he must not go on with Helga. . . . The dead Llewelyn had confided Helga's property and money to the care of Charles. Of course, he was taking care of Owen Tredegar as well. He knew.

But did he know the man had come here, into this neighbourhood, that he was near to dying? He heard Charles's firm raucous tones in the drawing room telling the ladies, "Mrs. Tredegar is never coming back."

He hesitated some time. He was terribly shaken and revolted.

"That's what Tredegar wants me to do, you see. He has no pity, no respect for the conditions in which we live. He . . . and she are outside of life. They are phantoms."

"But aren't you going?" she asked. "Aren't you going to bring her back?"

"He wants to slough her off on me," said Windsor. "I am their only chance."

"And won't you take her?"

He looked deeply into her intimate eyes.

"Giulia, I'm sick of her. . . . I'm sick of the whole thing . . . to my marrow. She glares."

"Then give her to me!"

He was struck with astonishment at the strange thrill in her voice. He went across the room, finding himself unequal to taking it in. He, with his calm habits, his faint smile, looked the last man to have such curious things happen to him.

"You don't love her, then?" said his friend with penetrating inquiry.

"Oh, my God! Don't you?"

"Oh, I!" she exclaimed. "Then what is the matter with you?"

"Well, what is?" he inquired, throwing himself again on the divan, almost at the end of his tether.

"Do you really want to know?" she asked.

"Well, yes."

"A perfectly charming mediocrity of heart."

Giulia had never said anything before that might have been ruffling to her friend's *amour propre*. He looked up with renewed interest.

"Your organism was never intended," she went on, "for the strain of a relationship with extraordinary things, with tragedy or the sublime."

"Was yours?"

"I have never dared to examine the depths of my inability," she replied.

He turned his face away from the suffering he now saw in her. It made her seem on the point of some incommodious disintegration.

He was almost trembling from it as he got up and went to the window. He looked out across the peaceful slopes of the terraces. Their unchanged peacefulness came up to him at this troubled moment with an impression of something unfamiliar. His eyes travelled on down the long wooded slopes to the river and the fatal house with its roofs and chimneys shining rather golden in the late and faintly autumnal light. The house was empty of her, alone with its fate. He remembered that evening when she had first come. He had not yet seen her, but he had looked down on those roofs with that inexplicable fear. Omen.

He had a strong sensation of sorrow. Floating up through its tide, heaving up as it were like currents of another colour, rose qualm after qualm of pity, pity for Helga, for Giulia.

He turned and went back to his friend and put his arms round her with a sigh.

"Oh, my dear!" he said. "Don't you know that if I do go to her . . . if I go, we shall never come back?"

"I can't lose you *both!*" she cried.

"Both, both."

Then he found himself alone in the room. She had thrust him away, and gone in great haste, almost screaming as she ran: "I can't lose *her!*"

She had run into her bedroom and locked the door. He battered on it. This was more than he could bear.

"Go away," she cried out. "Your pitiless heart could never have known that I had it in me to break to pieces . . . I have broken to pieces. Windy, I broke to pieces . . . I lost my wits . . . I was raving . . . I told Giulietta she was your child."

"Giulia, Giulia!"

"And I sent Giulietta to Helga, to tell her, so she wouldn't go away with you."

CHAPTER XXXVIII RECORDS THE EXTRAVAGANT DEATH OF A PREPOSTEROUS MAN

THAT evening Windsor again made the journey to the farm where Tredegar was lying. It was a wrench to leave Giulia's house before she had opened her door, or called through it, at least something to alleviate the distress and confusion into which her announcement had plunged him. But she would not say another word, and he could not go on pounding at the door of an unreplying lady in the presence of her ponderous husband. Charles had come back by dinner time, and Windsor, with no heart to see him, had slipped out.

With Windsor's heaped distresses and confusions, his brutality to the dying man weighed on him like a sickness. He loathed and suffered.

He left his car in a lane at a little distance, not to give Tredegar the noise, and without meeting the Comic Mask or anyone, he went wearily up the creaking stairs to the room. The situation was the same, he thought. It seemed like a repeated dream, even to the sleeping cat and the Latin book open at the Office for the Dead.

"Well, I'm done for," whispered the ruin in the bed, whom

Windsor was shocked to find, on looking closer, so much more ruined. "Charles Crawford has done me in."

"What under heaven do you mean?"

"Got wind of my coming here . . . gets wind of everything. Nabbed the poor boy I sent for you, of course . . . came to make me force Helga to let you alone."

Windsor could let out nothing but a gasp.

"I'm gored by a rhinoceros! . . ." Tredegar was interrupted by one grasshopper eye protruding round the door.

"He's been so bad with hemorrhage," began the farm-wife, to Windsor, who now observed red signs of havoc about the bed, "ever since the big gentleman went. . . ."

"Keep that woman away!" panted Tredegar. "She's a Jew . . . she's got her ticket for the Golgothan show, all on a summer's day. . . . He, singing of summer in full-throated ease. . . . Dirt cheap. Did you know they sold tickets for that affair? Tuppence for children not in arms. . . . Must have her shilling's-worth, that woman! Private business . . . giving up the ghost. . . . Clay cold. . . . He has cut me off. . . . '*Precísa est velut a texénte vita mea: dum adhuc ordírer, succídit me.*' . . ."[1]

"What does Charles know about your affairs?" cried Windsor.

"Everything."

Windsor had burst out with the question, unable to bear more. The reply came as gently as if he had inquired the time of day.

"Llewelyn and that Behemoth were thick as thieves," Tredegar went on. "Since Llewelyn's death he has been taking care of Dagmar and me . . . I mean Helga. . . . He sent me her letters about you. I had told her not to expect answers. I wanted her to have a chance to forget me. Of course, she didn't dream of my proximity. . . . I didn't know you had been browsing in *that* field. How did I know you had more than one woman to get loose from? . . ."

Poor Windsor's state was past description. The recent blows dealt him by Tredegar and Giulia had come so thick that he was sunk now completely in confusion worse confounded.

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[1] My life is cut off as by a weaver; whilst I yet began, he cut me off.

"The great ox wanted me to go over there," said the sick man, "and disappear with Helga again . . . forever. It was his will against mine. . . . He thought it an easy thing to deal with a dead man. But it is an intractable species. . . . There is no dead will. *Et exaltávit cornu pópuli sui.* . . . He hath exalted my horn. . . ."

He paused, struggling for breath. Windsor, perfectly still, could be said to glare.

"When he found I was dying he tried to make me write, binding her on penalty of my curse never to return nor hold communication with you. It was war without quarter. I was afraid my soul would leap out of its scabbard and kill him. . . . I was deadlier than he . . . even though 'as a lion he hath broken all my bones.' *Quasi leo sic contrívit ómnia ossa mea.* . . . There was no quarter. It was war, war for plunder."

"What plunder?" broke out Windsor, almost unable to articulate.

"You."

Tredegar fell into a convulsion of feeble coughing. Through it came the shattered words, the more dumbfounding for being piecemeal.

"He wants you for *his* wife, but I am going to have you for *mine*. . . . Oh, Gregory!"

The guest knelt to sustain the shaking body which now looked as if it might fall out of the narrow bed. The disturbed puss rose, made a soft camel back, and went with sweet indignation to the foot, where it curled again. Windsor was unable to think. Across the chaos in his brain went a memory of something read long ago . . . an Elizabethan . . . drawn and quartered . . . eviscerated. The executioner's words, "His heart is in my hand, and Gregory in his mouth! Oh, egregious papist!"

He did not know what to do to ease those convulsions of coughing. A few feeble words broke forth between the paroxysms:

"*Sperábam usque ad mane,* 'I hoped until the morning . . . but as a lion, so hath he broken all my bones.' "

Windsor was full of pity and wonder over this "egregious papist," so startlingly alive with the energy of projects and passions while reciting over his own dying agony the Office for the Dead.

"Tell Dagmar . . ." Tredegar gasped out and was unable to finish. Then Windsor made out the word "priest." As he was about to run away to get his car, his last sight of the dying man was of a sudden inundation, terribly bright, flooding his nostrils, mouth, and breast.

Petrified by the spectacle, he was completely bowled over to see in the midst of that battlefield of a face the most playful smile appear. And in his own singular voice, rich and profound, this inconceivable man produced,

> " 'Tell Isabell the Queene, I lookt not thus,
> When for her sake I ran at tilt in Fraunce,
> And there unhorsed the duke of Cleremont.' "

Windsor fled incontinently, colliding with a doctor on the stairs. Of him he inquired the whereabouts of the most convenient priest. The nearest was in his own town, Father Angelo, the bell ringer of the Roman Catholic chapel.

He brought back with him the plump and angelic Italian who ministered to the souls of compatriots that laboured on farms and in neighbouring mills. He did not see Tredegar again, but after waiting two hours in the little hallway, he received the news from the priest, emerging from his long durance in the room, that the man was dead.

The pale Italian looked as if he had seen a regiment of ghosts.

CHAPTER XXXIX IT IS HARD TO MARRY A GOBLIN

My throat is befriended," said Helga. "It was my throat that was so unbefriended after its royal fare of kisses."

In the little street of Cortina, between the passing of two old peasant women with wide long skirts and red kerchiefs, Windsor kissed her throat again.

There was a sound of hurrying rivers from the encircling mountains, from the rich fields tapestried with pale autumn crocuses, the *colchico autunnale*.

"The little rugged cubic houses of the south are like books on end with the lanterns streaming up," she said, "and inside there is life loving its living, though Tredegar is dead. . . . These little wooden houses like Swiss ones have stones on their roofs because they are too light. . . . I have unstrapped my heart. I am turning into a woman."

"The great thing is to achieve ease in rapture," said he. "We are rapt. Are we at ease?"

A peasant woman was singing a high song in the darkness of the fields.

"A human voice at a distance has more pathos than anything else in the world," said Helga, and he added:

"It is really a cry for mercy."

"It is a cry for Tredegar," said she.

"Helga! It is my cry for mercy. Don't keep me reaching for you round that man. I claim the right of the living to live."

"Tredegar, be quiet!" said she.

He had followed her that morning from Mestre, toiling up the giant's stairway of the mountains in a clanking car. They had been wandering among the crocus-tapestried fields all day, murmuring to each other, almost under their breaths, watching out for safe places where they might kiss.

Now they had returned to the village and were loitering toward their hotel, reluctant to go into the lighted dining room impracticable for kisses. They were standing on a bridge over a little river still furious from the high hurl. The music from the hotel was belching out.

"Giulietta is not my child," he said. "It was a kind of frenzy at losing you that made her give the poor girl that pain . . . and betray the old tale to you. . . . Did you know that Giulia, as she said, could 'break into pieces?' I didn't."

"Yes," replied Helga, "but I will console her. . . . Are you loved enough?"

"Do you think," he said, "that one of the forty thousand lights in your eyes is my child?"

"You have forty thousand children, my King of Elves."

"Think of all the elves having only one sister, and you are she," said Windsor.

"*Bedaarende!* Your head is supporting the whole night."

"But the night would be blown away," he returned, "if I did not have this great column of the winds to hold in my arms. Shall I be living to-morrow? . . . Beauty flows over you from your head downwards, from the seat of your thoughts, like the living waters of these fountains. . . . Is it Danish? What is '*Bedaarende*'?"

"It is a beautiful word. . . . You are burning," she said. "How cool my cheek must be to your burning lips!"

Windsor's eyes were glittering as if with fever. Every now and then he lifted her hand and laid the conflagration of his forehead into the cool palm.

"I feel very strange," he said. "Perhaps it is the thin high air. But just now I don't feel the power to commit an error . . . It was all begun in the preposterous. I have faith in this absurdity. But let us go softly as we can. . . . Shall I be living tomorrow?"

She laid her hand over his scorching eyes. "You are as fierce a lion as ever licked a wound."

He said, "Again you are laughing. Again I kiss a laugh. It is the only kiss."

"Though my grief be as scarlet, it shall be as wool," said Helga. "I am your woolly child now."

"You are a white whale, filled to bursting with Jonahs and covered with rusty harpoons that clank. But you have escaped. You breech free, you shake off the boats . . . and you are a little maiden."

Helga began to weep. He said:

"Don't do that. Don't let this grief be less. Stand firm and take me into the sweet cradle of your mind. . . . You can stand firm because whatever you stand on becomes solid under your foot. Did you know that Giulia loved your foot with its cloud-hewn arch? . . . As Jackie loves Rosemary's. Yours are the feet that walk on water, straight out to their Lord. . . . Do you ever repent your unforgivable generosity to me? . . . No, you can't repent the unforgivable. . . . Shall I be living tomorrow?"

He put his hand to his forehead, pondering:

"There was something I wanted to tell you all the way across in that speedless prison of a ship. . . . It was simplicity itself. Oh, yes, I love you."

"Am I the one?" she asked.

"You are the ten million."

He had told her everything of Tredegar's recital and of his death, adding that the dying man had given her to him.

"Then he has unstrapped my heart," she said sobbing. "He has feathered my nest with elf feathers. I must spare his hospitality my groans."

"No one has the strength for bliss like you," he said. "I am shattered."

"I live shattered," said she. "Man can live by staggering alone."

"We must lie at ease for hours and hours to make amends for all this bliss," said he. "Stand firm. I must have your rule, Cynara, the loose rein of your mind. . . . I wish I could lie at ease with only your vagrant mind beside me. . . . This circle of monsters, these mountains goad me . . . Shall I be alive to-morrow?"

"You are burning. I am afraid you will be consumed. . . . Are you loved enough?"

"How obstreperously beautiful you are!" he said, his parched tongue giving a dry sound in his mouth. "I see why God is with you. Napoleon said God was on the side of the biggest cannon. One can hear the tread of your soul as you enter a room. But no one hears it like Giulia and Rosemary. . . . How women brag over us. They vaunt their love. Giulia doubted that I would come. . . . Shall I be alive to-morrow?"

Presently, still above the roaring stream and holding her in his arms, he said:

"You are so cool! You are marble."

"The marble aches when you lean against it."

"Oh, aching marble!" he cried. "Let me cool this heat on you!" He smiled perpetually, his long fine teeth gleaming in the darkness, but it was like a mouth open in pain.

"You look like a tiger in the jungles of heaven," she said. "A tiger is the King of Elves. Let us pretend this happened long since, Ariel, so it will be secure. . . . Do you remember when we stood between these steeps in that summer long ago?"

"Give us this day our daily past," he answered, laughing foolishly on her shoulder. "Let me drink the vintage of that summer long ago. I'm dying of thirst. Your hair is vintage. Why can I not take it down and drink it?"

"Not yet."

"Your face is a sweet flat mask," he said. "You have Northern eyes designed to look on snow. Your nose is not a beak. It is a nose of the North that does not swoop out into the cold. Let me kiss your flat mask."

"Yes," she returned, "you narrow, delicate, laughing lost face, aquiline!"

That day and afterward they were always avoiding the people that went to and fro along the paths through the rich fields; weathered tourists in sports clothes, swinging sticks, smoking, admiring; or old, old people creeping beside old invalid sons and daughters; stalwart women in sweaters and sandals like Helga's, or feathered women, clicking and stumbling on satin stilts.

They kept well away from the cord that swung up like a long arrow slant, bearing screaming passengers in a great basket to a height. They never went near enough to read the warning: "*Attenti alla Teleferica,*" which seemed to imply more solicitude for pedestrians below than for the contents of the basket which might at any moment be carelessly let fall.

"Have you minded the strangers prowling here in such numbers?" he asked.

"No, the more the merrier," she replied. "It was the one stealthy one in a place, apparently out for the beauties of Nature, that always got me down. . . . I don't mind being the stealthy one myself, but then, of course, I don't happen to be sleuthing anybody."

He was discomposed by this. He tried to shake off horrid images of Helga wandering the world in a stealthy way with Tredegar.

"And these peasants have no ill will," she went on as they passed a village of three or four wooden houses, built above their cow sheds, the troughs in the yards gushing with the sweet unceasing water from the heights.

"No ill will, it seems, for the strangers that walk through their fields and look into their little secret stables with the holy picture of Mary and her Child above the door to make the sweet cows glad . . . the whittled posts, the pails, the churns, the heaps of manure they are saving for the grass."

She had been hastening like a child with treasure, to show him the mountains and the people.

"Helga, you are a Doric temple sheltering little birds," he had cried out. "I don't know that I have the strength for the ineffable."

"No, now, only the ineffable can get us down," she returned.

And by evening he was spent with the long journey culminating in this rapture. He pressed his hands hard to his forehead.

"My God, I feel as if I had been talking blank verse all day long. You've infected me. It makes me sick. . . . I am really rather ill, you know. Let's go in. Let me lie by you as by a cool river."

She did not move.

"I believe you don't want me with immediate entirety as I want you!" he cried out in abrupt anger.

"You see, I made that sort of love not to be," she answered. "I have to go rather slowly with that sort of love."

"But I will make it be!" he retorted. "When you seem one step behind me in passion you throw me back on my haunches. You knock me in the middle of the leap."

She stood considering.

"What's the matter? Have you turned monkish like your master?" he cried again. "You have to marry me, you know. Hard and fast marriage. As soon as that little idiot of a Sylvia has set me free. I want you *nailed* . . . like a trophy. . . . Isn't that noble and nude and antique? I'm going to wrap you." He enveloped her hard where she still stood with her considering look. "We shall be married immediately that message comes," he said. "We shall finish this."

"Are you sure we really need to be married?"

"If you think I'll stay with you on any other terms," he returned angrily, "you are very much mistaken. I've had enough of that sort of thing."

When Helga showed no sign of blenching at this, he was chilled, seeing her too clearly such an outsider from the customary ways of women.

She had taken the revelation made by Giulietta apparently with simple sorrow. As far as he had been able to make out, this sorrow was only for them: if there had been a reasonable admixture of a personal pain because he had loved before, because, as she had believed, he had had a child by another woman, it found no expression. Certainly she made none of the orthodox feminine signs.

He thought, "Do women have to be taught even their fundamental emotions by their mothers? . . . No mother, no fundamental emotion. . . . Are men taught jealousy by their fathers?" He wished he could ask Giulia.

"The idea of marriage gives me the most extraordinary pain," said Helga. "If you don't mind, Sweet Fellow, I think I'll have nothing to do with it."

"You're going to be damned well married!"

"You see, for me marriage is something that belongs to fiends," she said thoughtfully.

"And being married to a mere human being would seem rather mild, I suppose?"

"Yes, it would be mild." She began to weep again. "I'm afraid I am not mild enough for it. The fiend's child is for black marriage."

CHAPTER XL SEVEN ROOMS APART

WELL, I suppose you will learn to take it or leave it, my tusk," said Helga. "If you must have me, take as much as you can stomach, I mean, and don't worry about the things that are too damnified."

"How can I not worry about them, having senses?" he said, pulling up from the grass where they sat a lavender crocus, slim as a little girl. "And over all of you is that terrible sheen."

"But when a man intends to eat what disagrees with him, he takes precautions," said she. "Before a carouse, a good drunkard will line himself with philosophic oil."

"What philosophic oil would you suggest?" he asked. Then seeing a certain befuddled look that always unmanned him, he pressed her palms to his lips, "Oh, oil and milk and honey of you!"

He was always less feverish in the mornings and somewhat less prone to blank verse. He had just been very angry with his Helga. When he had spoken again of marriage, she had shown the same repugnance, and repeated that she had made that sort of love not to be. She had added without conviction but as if anxious to please:

"Nevertheless, if you should really want me to, Sweet Fellow, I fancy I could take it up again."

"If I really *want!*" he burst out. "Do you mean you have no faculty of wanting of your own?"

"Oh, I daresay, in time, I shall want everything that is to be wanted."

"Dearest, littlest, biggest, gorgeous, idiotic being!" he cried. "Couldn't you manage to handle me with just a little bit more tact?"

"Oh, my poor cheated sweet, you've got a poor lover! I'm so out of the way of making love. . . . But I'll soon begin to pick it up, you'll see."

"Why didn't you say pick it up as *before*, as before in your former marriage?" he asked angrily.

"I stopped myself," she returned simply. "I begin to know that only hot fiends like scalding truth." Windsor shuddered, remembering Tredegar's use of the very word. "I somehow felt the presence of the scalding here," she concluded.

"Oh, you *did!*" Windsor was highly sardonic. "You are coming on! Is it conceivable that an adult woman can behave as though there were no such element as human jealousy to be reckoned with?"

After a little he added:

"Why haven't you any look of fright, at least of curiosity?"

"Perhaps because I've never had to reckon with jealousy," she returned. "Perhaps it is the only thing I haven't had to reckon with."

"Well, as long as you don't know about these wicked passions, you can't be looked upon as a Christian." He was able to laugh. "You've got something to find out there, you heathen."

After another pause, he said, "The truth is I haven't the strength to live with the memory of Tredegar always in view. 'May my name step in and hide his.' " He quoted from his favourite, Donne.

Then suddenly he cried out: "You will have to forget you ever had another husband! Will you do this for my sake?"

"No."

Presently she added, "There won't be any difficulty in remembering you both."

"You can't have any idea," said he angrily, "how disgusting it is to find myself full of mediæval emotions. You humiliate me with that."

"But," said she, kissing his shoulder, "there is so much fun in remembering *you.*"

"But, Helga, don't you know that a proper mistress observes the conventions and never speaks of 'both'? But I suppose you, terrific aboriginal that you are, who don't know how to behave in any conditions, cannot be expected to behave properly in love."

Windsor was very careful of his passion after that first day, when he had seemed so fevered. It became an essential part of his protest against their situation, the inane and undignified waiting for a divorce, that his passion should not get unleashed. It grew highly important to his delicacy that what the people at home (especially his mother) were thinking about Helga and himself should not be true.

So, in the height of his caresses, he would turn away. And this hard restraint made him sometimes look strangely cold to his friend, a moment before almost intolerably burned with embraces.

"We must handle this love with gloves," he said. "It mustn't get the better of us."

"Why?"

"Do I understand that you are really asking 'why'?" His smile was a grimace.

"Yes. Is the law after us?"

"Does it astonish you so much that there are certain laws of simple decency?"

She gazed at him thoughtfully.

"Heavens! but it is hard work being in love with a rudiment!" he cried, then patiently tried to make his meaning clear.

"Listen, Helga, all our friends back there are thinking that we are actual lovers, living together, you understand, before we have the right. . . . Now, it seems an exquisite thing to me that *we* should know we have refrained. Even though it is the last thing they would believe. Do you get it, my darling fool?"

"*Vir,* virile, *virtutem,* virtue," said Helga apparently wide of the mark. "I love virtue, but he whom my soul loveth hath little virtue."

Windsor was rather taken aback.

"You will admit there is some virtue in endurance," he said laughing, and went on with jocular complaint, "A good mistress shouldn't give her lover pause. Mistresses should entertain sentiments becoming to mistresses. A lover shouldn't have to be astonished at his mistress's ideas. . . . Even though your aboriginal mind can't take in all the reasons, I should think you would instinctively feel that there is some decency in suffering for a graceful idea."

"It is trivial to suffer without compulsion."

"But Helga, by your own account," he brought out with an unusual lack of logical sequence, "By your own account, you are not ready to give yourself to me."

"Oh, but that is from hellish dearth of virtue."

He turned away from Tofana, the "pet" mountain of Helga, but wherever he turned, the circle of monsters was intact. The valley was a green prison walled with mountains.

"The children of this valley," said Helga, "do not believe there is anything beyond this wall. See, high, on the instep of Sorapis, the little crouching house where I lived with Tredegar. I slept on the stove. . . . This place was not very fashionable then. There were not many winter sports. We did not ride on the snow. It rode on us. It rode . . . but in the spring legions, legions, the flowers in these fields. The cows are full of flowers. . . . The mountains sit on your shoulder, confidential, and show their scars."

"Helga!" Windsor, lying among crocuses in the rich grazing of the field, was writhing with the pestilence of Tredegar.

"Helga, you say you made that kind of love not to be. . . . You were so young. You were a child at first, sleeping on the stove. You were still almost a child when he betrayed the truth about your father's death. . . . He said that when he spoke out of that dream you had been wandering together only five years, and you were twelve when you began . . ." Windsor's fine beaked face, glittering with a slight fever, was fixed on inward calculation. He concluded:

"When you made that sort of love not to be . . . tell me, did you make it not to be *before it began?*"

There was no reply. It seemed to him that he was gazing at an Asiatic mask of extreme antiquity, carved in opaque stone with flat impassive ancient uncommunication, the eyes nothing but long slits cut by a rude instrument.

When he first came clanking up the mountains, he had not found her in the hotel, but ensconced in that little crouching house on the "instep of Sorapis." The same peasants were there that had cared for the Tredegar wanderers years before. An old, old woman with the bright fringed shawl over her bosom and the wide, wide woollen skirt looped up over plentiful petticoats, received him, but barred the door because her signora was asleep. Below her kerchief, black and purple, her hair, still black, was oiled back from her bony yellow temples, and confined in a tight nest of braids behind with long decorated silver pins. Her cheeks burned with the bursting red of mountaineers, shot with little redder veins. She had no teeth. Her body was erect, with a noble waist, defined in her tight bodice, cut in and corseted in the old fashion. She spoke ill in Italian of Italians and said they had "eaten better" under the Austrians before the war. According to her, Italian soldiers were the naughty fellows, the *cattivi* who had burned their tiny wooden houses just for fun, for "*gelosia.*" . . .

Titian, Tiziano himself, she insisted, was born far down there in that minute house in Campo di Sotto. . . . His cradle had looked up at Sorapis with its long slant. . . . He had come back from the Doges and painted a picture on the front of his little house. . . . There it had been for hundreds of years, till the naughty Italians spoiled it. You could still see morsels of that colour on the battered wall.

Wheat was growing in a field the size of a handkerchief, below the house. Tripping through it were harebells dazzlingly blue. Red clover, very crimson, waved beside it. The yellow flowers were called *scarpi del' signore*, the Lord's shoes. Up to the edge of the trees the great grass of the valley sheathed the earth like an inland sea. At this season the cows were grazing higher up, with their calves.

The old woman said she had never been anywhere but in these fields and in these two houses, her husband's and her father's far over there on the other side of the valley, in the tiny village called Giuditta that the Italians had burned. "Never, never anywhere," she repeated with apparent pride. "*E una cosa!*" It is a thing. It is something to be remarked.

Windsor was rather set up to find he could understand her pretty well, thanks to the old studying of Dante with Giulia and the necessary communications on the Italian ship as he came to Genoa. He understood that the green expanse below them, intersected by turbulent rivers, was owned communally by the inhabitants. One could see the division marked off for each family, a diminutive square of wheat would be growing in one, some other produce in another the size of a handkerchief, all in the great prevailing sea of succulent grass.

He thought he saw five tiny villages. The mountains seemed to lean over the valley, too large, defying perspective. Their naked flanks, scored ferociously with slanting strata and crashing into jagged pinnacles, had every colour mingled to prevailing gold, or saffron.

There were no animals helping in the fields. He saw only lithe women with bundling petticoats kirtled up, old men and children. In some places the wheat was ready for the scythe. Everywhere was the prevailing grass.

He sat with the old woman, who was named Serafina Siorpaes, on wooden benches in the high porch. A gigantic St. Bernard lay beside him, waiting for his winter sport of pulling people out of the snow. There was one on every porch, making the house look unreasonably small.

There were cow stalls under the house, at present empty of the soaring cows grazing in higher valleys with their calves. That part of the house was of stone and stucco, the upper part was of wood, projecting like a Swiss cottage beyond the lower, and supported on stakes roughly carved.

The idea of Helga asleep in the house accelerated the beating of Windsor's heart. He felt a mounting fever in the high air scented with delicious grass. His face burned. He was so fatigued that he did not want to see Helga yet. He had been relieved when the old woman barred the door. There was the good smell of manure, carefully saved in enormous heaps to be mixed with black mold for the nursing of the grass, blade by blade. How sweet of them to leave the flowers in it. The honest grass was none the worse for wantons.

Beside the house, delicious water from the mountain ran perpetually through a great trough, the silver milky water of melted snow. It fell from the trough making bright brooks down through the velvet grass. Opposite, across the valley, almost as if his hand could touch it, in incredible largeness, bulked Tofana, Helga's pet mountain that came when she called it. He turned his fatigued eyes away from its terrible turrets.

There was a stir behind them in the house. He jumped to the open door. Copper kettles, carved wooden stools, a tall edifice of stone and stucco built against the opposite wall, a fireplace in its flank, a bed on top. Helga sleeping on the stove. He ran in and dragged her down.

He had made her gather up her bundles and descend with him to the hotel. There, when they had selected their rooms, he had wanted to put her farther away, but she had explained that they must have the same view of Tofana from their beds. Tofana bulked even more ferociously here in the middle of the valley than he had from the hillside house.

"Don't put me any farther off," Helga had said, "or we'll not be seeing the same thing. Aren't seven rooms enough?"

Then began the long ordeal. He never went near that door even to knock and call her. When he parted from her at night, "wrapping" her at the last, he had the perilous sensation that with one more hair's breadth of pressure, he could intentionally burst his heart. And he longed to put that pressure. He sometimes felt that nothing could ease his heart but to drench her with its contents. He was always more feverish at night, and he had extravagant images of drowning her in mingled tears and blood from his heart.

It killed him every night to leave her, and yet he longed to get away from those horrors of her past existence in which she seemed horribly rooted, caught like a toad in a stone of dead Tredegar. His passion penetrated this enclosure, and recoiled by turns, and all in wretched loneliness, unsuccoured by any understanding on her side of the keen stress. Sometimes he felt himself moving against her ignorance, her insensibility, as against a raised buckler of brass.

And this woman who did not know the commonest things, complexities familiar to a ten years' child, deluged him with utterance. From morning till night her voice was there, her inexhaustible speech.

At breakfast, he, always a little slow to get under way till he had swallowed coffee, could not get his breath for what she would have to tell him of her notions in the night.

"I am roaring like a surf!" she would say.

"Which way do you spell that, my roaring serf?" he asked. "Are you my serf or am I yours?"

"We wear the same collar," she replied.

Or, at their table on a balcony weighed upon by the portentous hulk of Tofana, while Windsor waited heavy-eyed, panting for the coming of the deliberate waitress with rescuing coffee, Helga would begin her rigmarole:

"Magnificat ánima mea Dóminum.
Et exultávit spiritus meus[1] . . .

I woke when the wild fowl were boding day," she went on. "I thought your small, hard, strong mouth was encircled by mine. I felt the bright teeth. . . . Your gigantic love had me in its clutch. It lifted my hair, tress by tress, like wind. It kissed and named each tress by a separate name and let it fall. . . . One was Kleis for the Lesbian's flowery daughter; one was Elpis, one Demo, one Euphrante, one Athenion, one Konopion, Rhodanthe, Agathon, Láis, Dercylis, Leto: and Euphorion, son of Helen and Achilles in the Shades. Some were boys and some were girls, but the most curled and golden was Kallistion. . . . I was as soft as earth, and your powerful voice naming my tresses, drenched my golden earth like hot summer rain, and I sprouted helplessly into helpless roses. I, the Spartan marble. . . . Lazarus, the defiled, the frozen, took up burning. . . . The still proud mechanism of your thought, the music of the anvil of your thought penetrated my metal, and you betrayed a woman into gold. . . . In my dream, this happened, you naming my tresses one by one, by the beautiful names dead Tredegar has named them by."

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[1] My soul doth magnify the Lord.
And my spirit hath rejoiced . . .
Canticle of the Blessed Virgin.

Then, through his astonished fury, Windsor was able to see a curious thing about his love. Though she suffered over certain memories as a human being would suffer, she did not, like a human being, try to eliminate painful records from her consciousness. She kept her memories in solution, liquidly mingling with her daily experiences. She selected and rejected nothing. She veiled nothing, familiar as she was with horrors. All was habitual grist to the mill of her mind. As she had said, hot fiends like scalding truth. Or at least, they have no art, or no desire to assuage it.

This recognition estranged him from her. For to him the selection and elimination of memories made a large part of the decency, the grace of the mental life. There were things of which a man did not speak to himself. That Helga evidently could not get any conception of this refinement into her head made him feel that isolation which oppresses us when too much in company with people of the lower orders who do not know what we are about.

So, unfortunately, would the ordeal of the day commence, which, as Windsor's fever increased, through the hours, would frequently seem an ordeal by fire. Sometimes, stung by passion and spent with repulsion, for the first, strangely enough, was never mitigated by the last, he would send her from him for the whole day long. Then he would wander, forlorn for lack of books, or a piano, of any familiar place of repose.

"We must hold out," he would say as he crushed his burning face against her throat. "Let us test the body long, before we test the soul."

"Heap it," she would reply, "as cameleers of the desert heap the camel, straw by straw . . . till his knees are quaking, till his belly touches dust. Let him totter. Let him crawl. . . . It is good sport for a sportful man."

"Good-bye, go away," he would conclude, "we shall not meet till evening, when we shall be less fierce, fatigued, reprieved."

"When we shall be full of strength," said she, "begirt, betrayed."

It was not in her to help him with a salutary illusion, she and her scalding truth.

When, safe from her, he woke in the mornings to the innocent and obedient arrival of the processional day, he breathed and reposed. To find himself momentarily secure from passion was like the deep enjoyment of leisure to a hard-driven labourer. He would lie in his narrow bed looking at Tofana from that first blinding appearance, bursting the capacious window, when every morning the unconvinced eyes would cry out, "That high! No, not that high!" He would lie there, released enough for wonder, until it came upon him that his ecstatic peace was obscurely at an end. What had become of his peace? Ah, it was that idea . . . again the turbulent idea taking the fort of his consciousness. The idea of Helga lying seven rooms away, lying as she was, as if the wind had thrown down and heaped ten thousand petals, the incomparable, divined, unproven horizontal.

There she lay, occult, looking at Tofana as she had said, "At the same thing." With a terrible sigh, he would take up his task.

Sometimes he would sit away from her at another table in the glaring dining room, covering the unusual arrangement by coming later from the fields. He watched her eat, reading at the same time the book propped against the bread. A human woman would have been a little disturbed at finding her lover go deliberately to another table. Not she; she had smiled vaguely as he entered and gone on reading. In the town by the river she had said that she meant to "take up books," but she rarely read. She had picked up the volume perhaps in the hotel.

He watched her throat undulating richly with her careless continued eating, the little rounded pouches above her downcast eyes catching the light which illuminated her lion-coloured hair with its nest of braids.

It was all quite charming, except that he was not pleased with the situation of her legs and feet. He could see under the table her noble feet encased in their shapeless strapped sandals rather dingy than white, curled round the fore legs of her chair, in a fashion somewhat deplorable. He wondered how long it would take her to note that many women were now lengthening their skirts.

Her continued smile began to arouse his curiosity. He called the polyglot headwaiter and asked him to take a peep over her shoulder. The man returned discreetly in a roundabout way and said that the book the Signora was reading was by *il signor* Nietzsche and was called, "*La Gaia Scienza, Le Gai Savoir, Die fröhliche Wissenschaft,* The Frolic Knowledge, or the Jolly Knowing."

When she had finished dining, Helga went out without benefit of her finger bowl, and with no apparent remembrance that Windsor was there. He followed immediately behind, for he had not been so leisurely with his dinner as she. He noticed, as he had noticed with some distress before, that her red dress, the gift of Charles, had been constructed for a woman of narrower dimension at the hips than Helga. It was not that she was wide, but that the dress was narrow. At every step the rear view of Helga was revealed even more than was fashionable at the moment. Her clothing had always given him one of the least of his pleasures in her.

"Why didn't you wait one moment for me?" he asked rather petulantly.

She turned with radiant delight.

"Oh, you told me to forget you, to-day, so I did."

Quite unconscious that her reply was none of the happiest, she leaned on his arm with as much pleasure as if she had pleased him. He detached himself and went up to his room, but after a little while, coming down again, he found her discoursing upon mountains with a total stranger on the *terrasse*.

Windsor went to take her away but was not immediately able to do so. Recognizing his presence with an expression of joy, she continued to the stranger:

"There is a mystical communication between the cloud and the mountain. . . . This morning (I watching from my bed, which I have drawn directly into the window) there was something conveyed in solemn silence. . . . Then the cloud withdraws with long clingings . . . adherences . . . emanating from between the horns of Tofana as if it were the thought of that horny head . . . as if the mountain had uttered the cloud."

Windsor started away but stopped again. The stranger, a plump elderly man, had uttered an enormous sigh. Helga made no account of the sigh, but gazed at Tofana, defined by a rich moon.

"Ih, storslaaet!" she exclaimed.

"A Scandinavian word, I believe," breathed the stranger in a German accent. "Can you define it also?"

"I said of the mountain, *'storslaaet,'* " she returned, "meaning that he is masterly done, blacksmithly pounded, well slogged."

"*Ach,* yes, so," agreed the stranger.

"At night his intricacy is even more of sorcerers," she continued. "It is the necromancy that is practised by the saint."

"The saint?"

"Don't let that trouble you," returned Helga. "It doesn't matter how wicked a saint is. . . . By day, colour of copper mingled with dust of plums and peacocks. . . . Above these secrecies of colour, worse than thieves, it is shocking to see the honest blue of a childish sky sailing innocent boats of clouds. . . . I am speaking now of skies that are the children of other, *hoary* skies. For *those* are equal in eld to mountains, and capable of all. . . . There are mists and times when there is nothing more fragile than a mountain. I have seen Vesuvius when he was no better than a moth. . . . This morning a thistledown went toward Tofana calling downily, 'Come on, old fellow!' and the mountain responded with a feather. . . . Above his frailty, a cloud was moulded iron."

Windsor dragged her away.

CHAPTER XLI AN ABYSS APART

THEN, the gradual anguish of resisted love. The two, holding apart, would feel something of intolerable self sweeping out like an inundation—toward, toward the other, reaching and seizing. They ached and trembled. Windsor would leave Helga almost without a word, a gasped good-night.

"Oh, this villainous patience!"

In each, the vivid image of an embrace was perpetually present in the consciousness. Sitting apart, they could have said, "We are strained and locked together. We are riveted." Sometimes, in going toward each other, they were so shaken, they would pause at a little distance to stifle their sobs. And as they neared, they had to exert the full power of their wills to arrest the progress in time, not to go straight on against each other's breasts.

He was afraid that she would touch him. Sometimes he sent her away brusquely, and she would go with no indication of offence.

"Haven't you any indignation?" he almost snarled at her.

"What is indignation?"

"Well, perhaps it is something decent people feel," he laughed, horribly ashamed of himself, but beyond control, his fever mounting high. "I've never seen you show a sign of decent anger against anything."

"No. I should be saying, 'Ah, yes, these things are so.' "

"Ah, yes, these things are so," he mocked. "But if they raged at us, we could at least rage back, couldn't we?"

"Not the scorched."

He threw himself into her lap, but even her cool knees seemed to burn him. There, it occurred to him to leave her. To sail back to where he came from and go into his own bed.

"Let's stop the talking," he said. "Don't say anything more. Don't burn."

"I don't think you can weather me," she answered. His anger returned. They watched the fields in silence.

Near them was a wooden cross with a hanging Christ. There was a rude roof over Him, a jug below His feet with wild flowers. Other offerings were stuck in the cracks of the post; paper roses, tin ornaments, the framed photograph of a dead child. Peasant women were cutting the grass for the second time, raking it with beautiful movements in great skirts kilted up. A girl was kneeling below an incline to get an enormous package of new-cut grass rolled onto her back. All about the fields, legs and feet of women and old men were just visible, like those of beetles, bent over below these packages of grass enclosed in great sheets, and larger than feather beds.

There were wide bottles of terra cotta or carved wood painted bright blue tied at the back of the women's waists. These held water in which were carried whetstones, wet for the scythes.

Some of the women wore their Sunday hats above the coloured kerchiefs on their heads, the uniform black felt hat with a feather curled over the front. Every woman wore her small flowered shawl with fringes crossed on her bosom, the point behind. Even the old women had slim supple bodies inside their long wide bundling skirts and tight corseted bodices.

"The secret shifting mists, clouds, and shadows on Tofana make shocking revelations," said Helga. . . . "There are greater distances and heights disclosed. . . . What looked like a single mass before, now heaves in unexpected towers miles apart. . . . A slow and intimate phantom is coming through the misty rift. Something silent has happened there."

"What did you say?" asked Windsor from a painful muse.

"From between Tofana's horns, he has sighed out a veil," said she.

The next morning Windsor had disappeared, and this time she went searching all day long. She found him at evening face down, lying among the crocuses. Something about his prone figure made her pause. There was refusal in the aspect of his fine back extended there. She stood looking down at the grace of the sloping waist, well revealed by the folds of his coat stretched upward with the lifted arms in which his face was hidden. He had drawn the Florentine chain out of his breast and had some of the links in his hand. She grew stealthy and went softly away to the edge of one of the streams, where she sat down concealed by willows. After a long time he came directly to her, and they lay reclined against the bank, clasped together.

"I went near you when you were lying there," she said, half suffocated by his heat.

"Yes, I know."

The certainty of this rejection made her slightly faint.

"No, no," she said, leaning exhausted on his exhausted breast, "no, no, you can't weather it!"

He brought out, "What would Tredegar say to me if he knew I had failed you? He gave you into my keeping."

"Well, he's dead as a doornail, God rest his soul," said she. "He can't call us to account."

"You know, he did suspect me," said Windsor.

"Yes, I suppose he did. It would be like him."

"He probed me horribly. I did all I could to fool him."

"But you must have fooled him," she returned, "or he would not have died."

"Would not have died!" he exclaimed.

"He wouldn't have left me. . . . The dead lamb has of course forgotten."

"I will never leave you!" Windsor cried out with passion. "I know you call your father 'the dead lamb.' I will be your father. . . ."

"It would be worse for me if you stayed," she said. "It is worse. You see, Sweet Fellow, you really cannot go me."

"Shall I tell you the truth?" said he suddenly, still holding her hard against him. "You fatigue me past words. It was so from the beginning. In spite of the adoration, the delight. When you come toward me, I fall back as from a fearful wind or a sky full of thunder. You are too heavily charged with everything, including horrors. *Come into my arms deeper, deeper, and let me hide your face.*"

"I know, I know," she murmured, blinding herself against him and stroking his hot head between her hands. "I would cower, too, if I were in your boots."

She was frightened at his look.

"I should think you would be pale with all this," she exclaimed, "but you are red with a continual blush."

"I could die of this blush," he said. "I am burning to death."

"Of course, you are feeling our situation painfully," she said. "You prefer things *comme il faut.*"

"For God's sake, don't you?"

"I think you are dying from indecency," she amplified. "I flourish on it from habit."

She got up from his now unresisting arms. Only the Florentine chain impeded her, catching at her girdle. She released it and laid it back on his breast, then stood uncertainly near him in the twilight, looking toward Tofana.

"You stand there like a Fate," he said. "No, you stand the fated one, looking at your Fate. I feel myself nailed upon you as on a cross. I am nailed to your Fate."

"You have intimations of escape," she rejoined. "Make a run for it."

"I have a feeling that it would be useless. . . . Take away your mountain. It rolls on me like a whale."

As they went back through the darkling paths, he laughed a little.

"I think I'm acting like the devil because I haven't any books."

"You are acting like the devil because you are an uprooted tree thrown to the senseless surge."

When they reached the hotel there waited the passionately longed-for message that announced Windsor free from Sylvia.

The two did not look at each other, but went up to their separate chambers.

That night he wrote to Giulia, "For Christ's sake, take me into that quiet room and let me sleep." He tore the page to shreds, then dragged his bed into the window as Helga said she had done with hers. The two lay, seven rooms apart, staring all night at the mountain.

CHAPTER XLII PARTED. THE WRONG KIND OF EQUIPAGE

ONE morning Windsor tottered and fell as he got out of bed. He had scarcely eaten for days. He had lapsed into the fever and decay of the molested soul. For Windsor's soul had been molested, and his precarious stomach, the tender husband of his soul, was in a frenzy. He rested awhile, and then went more firmly to find his friend. Helga looked wan as he led her down to the stream.

"But even when you are tired," he said, "you are too strong for me. I've been coming to the complete recognition that I can't bear things."

"It would not have been decent of you if you could," said Helga. "Even I can see that. . . . There is a cloud around his throat." She was looking at Tofana. "The great difference between mountains and men is their behaviour toward clouds. Mountains are not too much abashed at clouds. They are on private terms with them . . . terms that have no name . . . whisper."

"I am not on private terms with you," said Windsor.

"I have never seen a hat so plumed!" Her eyes were still on Tofana. Now, they fell to a group of old peasant women that passed them in their big bundling skirts, tight bodices, kerchiefs, with black felt hats sporting feathers for Sunday, much less effulgent than that of Tofana.

"Their slow noble innocent movements!" said Helga. "Suddenly the old women argue very hard like squirrels with a querulous high yelp. . . . But they are appeased more quickly than squirrels. . . . They stop whirring, like clocks. . . . They are shrewd, but constitutionally prone to love."

"I am compelled to say I didn't hear what you said," said Windsor. "It's often so when you are talking. I can't explain it, but I seem incapable of listening. I'm frequently so with music."

"Everything is tough for you," said she, "because you are not constitutionally prone to love. Prone love makes no bones of ticklish conditions. . . . Yet even I made bones with Tredegar."

Windsor's eyes were bloodshot. "Stop the talking. Let me wrap you," he said. "I have something to tell you. . . . I think I have inherited Tredegar's anger."

She started violently, but he held her tight. They were by the wild stream again where they had lain before.

"Everything has failed you," he said more gently, speaking against her throat where his lips were pressed. "And I think all the failures of all history were perfecting failure for my perfect failure. . . . I am a coward, Helga. I am afraid of you. And your hideous ambient turns me to burning stone."

"Perfect love casteth out fear," she returned. "Woe to the journeymen of love who love imperfectly . . . with poor and timid craft as you love me and I loved Tredegar."

"Have we not felt the damned passion to the limit?" he asked.

"We were not master craftsmen. We were not princes of love."

"I with you and you with your Tredegar!"

He turned on her a fierce look from his exacerbated eyes, shot with traceries of blood. She shrank. Presently she said:

"It is odd about my horny heart. . . . I would have thought there was no fragment left to break."

"Don't slaughter me!" he cried.

"It isn't your fault, Sweet Fellow. . . . And really it doesn't matter much."

"In Christ's name, why doesn't it matter?"

"Well, in that summer long ago, you know . . ." she replied. "Would you say it matters much now if the heart of Héloïse was broken?"

"Yes," he thundered. "A thousand times, yes! It will matter forever. It will matter for all women's hearts, Eve's, Hagar's, Giulia's, Phædra's, Ophelia's, Helga's, Mary's, all the exquisite hearts. . . . And the stain will never be washed off from the hands of Time."

"And what about men's broken hearts, Sweet Fellow?"

"Oh, damn men's broken hearts! . . . I see your breast decorated with swords. I wish they were driven through my body into yours and I might die on you."

"Oh, you do. You do die on me. . . . Aren't you the most dead this cross could hold?"

She began to beg him as she had done all these days to see a doctor about his persistent fever.

"That was a terrible idea we had of marriage, wasn't it?" he said, disregarding her.

"To put the darling foam of the sea on oath was too much for the devil's daughter."

"Your impression of me, naturally, is of something of light substance," he said.

"You are so light you are crushing me to death."

"Don't you think you will suffer for having said that?" he asked.

"All my life."

"A passion for paradox is apt to betray the kindest into cruelty," he went on. "I suppose you would say that Tredegar was so heavy he was easy to carry."

Helga's eyes had a hot glitter, too, in her pale face.

"We must see if this fever is of the body," she said. "It can't be all of the soul, for mine was gutted long ago, by incendiaries. And yet, I've got a furnace going too. Fever's catching, like good spirits. . . . If I don't take care of you in that summer long ago, I shall lie howling when I'm dead."

"The idea of your being dead is blasphemy."

"It is the blasphemy of my living," she returned, "that you are not stiff enough to bear. . . . You must get down from these mountains, or you'll go up in smoke. This is a hostelry for retired fiends, not elves."

He agreed to go, like a man in a dream. She helped him gather his luggage and engaged a car, haggling over the price with the sly look Giulietta had seen in the village, and turning her back, laboriously to count her money. He hated it corrosively. He walked with her once more into the fields and left her there.

"What will you do?" he asked, scarcely able to stand.

"Oh, I'll be as before, you know."

"Won't you go back to your River House?"

"I've an idea that isn't really my house," said she. "People can't make you have a house. Not as easily as all that. I'll stay where there are plenty of mountains. I'll have traffic. But, oh, Sweet Fellow, what will you do back there with all this love to waste?" She wept abruptly, like a sudden gush of rain in hot summer, immediately dried.

"Why do I leave you?" he asked strangely.

"You would not, if we had a valid joy," she answered. "Only a valid joy can trick old tricky Death."

"Do you think I *can* go, Helga?" He looked scarcely capable of the mere locomotion.

"Easy does it, my hearty! Let's not let out anything extraordinary," said she. "There's been too much of that sort of thing. And it's hard to stomach, at the best. Think of your own tavern, out of these screaming seas. Up sail and roll away, my bully!"

"Tredegar said I couldn't stand the gaff," said Windsor, looking back.

"Don't mind the old boy's blab. They've clapped a squelcher on *his* chops for good and all."

"You *are* a goblin, you know!" he muttered after a bitter pause.

"Heave off, my beauty, while I look away."

He turned back once and saw her sitting on the ground. He detested her when she was in the vein for that sort of talk. That detestation, as if she meant it should, helped to sting him on his road.

The ordeal by fire had lasted twenty days. On the evening of Windsor's first coming to the heights when, hot and fatigued, he had talked in blank verse to Helga, something was going on in the town by the river on the other side of the world.

A row of persons were sitting on a grassy bank by the road. Pale asters waved a little among their legs which slanted down the bank: the strong legs of a youngish man hard to the touch, the merry legs of four children, gymnastic even in repose, and the thin shanks of an old man draped in an unnecessary largeness of trouser, which waving slightly in the breeze disclosed an unpropitious laxity of woollen hose.

They were Jackie Windsor, the children of the Reverend George (minus the marching baby at home in the arms of Mrs. Chick's daughter) and old Mr. Brewster.

"What are we waiting for?" asked the old man, coming out of a momentary excursion into oblivion.

"For Rosemary, of course," said Maidie severely. These children called their mother by her Christian name.

"Of course, of course," he hurriedly rejoined in some embarrassment. Children hold one up to such a high standard of presence of mind. "Of course. They've had Rosemary in hospital again. . . . But she's coming back now . . . any day . . . I remember perfectly. Only I was thinking just for a moment of something else."

"Don't you remember, you promised her you wouldn't die till she came back?" said the Infant Samuel.

"Yes, yes. And I haven't, have I?" He looked at them proudly, as for approbation, from his ancient blue eyes, moist with perpetual tears. He added wittily, "It was a good deal to do for a friend."

The eldest boy turned to Jackie.

"Old Mr. Brewster wrote Mother a letter to the hospital yesterday, four pages, and all it said was, 'Come soon, come soon, come soon, come soon.' "

"And what did you write to her?" asked Jackie, trying to steady his shaking hand, for Maidie had laid hers on it.

"Oh, we've written her every day," said Matthew. "We've told her everything, including white mice and Father's sermon, 'Drop down dew, ye heavens, from above, and let the clouds rain the just; let the earth be opened and bud forth a Saviour.' He wanted the Saviour to hurry. . . . He said it's getting harder and harder to wait. And it is, you know."

"Did you tell her anything about me?" asked Jackie.

"Everything except about you being drunk with Michael again," said Maidie with a discreet feminine air. "But that's all over town."

They were silent awhile, looking down the highway where they expected the car to come in sight between the hills.

"I can feel her coming by the warmth along the road," said Jackie.

"I can remember being singularly happy once before," said the old man. "I remember it distinctly. . . . Rosemary was coming home from school. . . . But it must have been some time since. I remember I found it rather unnerving."

The children listened with a show of respect, though they had a moderately poor opinion of the speaker's mental gifts.

"Awfully nice of you not to have told her," said Jackie.

"About your being drunk?" asked Maidie.

"She's broad, though," the eldest boy put in. "She's a kind of a man-about-town. . . . Not about cruelties, though. She's awfully down on hurting things, vivisections and hangings and so forth. . . ."

"Mrs. Tredegar said she pets everything she touches," interpolated Maidie.

"As I was saying, she's broad," resumed the boy. "Remarkable how broad she is! We had a tramp in the garret for quite a while once. Fed him regular. And when she found out she rather liked it. Almost any other woman would have perished."

"Strange to think how many women have perished," said the old man, wool gathering, "in the last hundred years." He patted the littlest Johnny's knee with an uncertain hand. "It leaves one curiously lonely."

"Yes," said the Old Baby. It was not his habit to reply when addressed. When he did, it came in the nature of a pleasant little surprise. He nestled against old Mr. Brewster, getting a trifle sleepy. The old man, hearing this kind rejoinder, and fearing he had neglected so affable a neighbour, laid his arm round the little shoulder as he said with grave politeness:

"I am enjoying your society immensely."

"So am I," said the Old Baby simply.

"I'm afraid you are getting cold," said the old man. "Would you like to sit in my lap?"

The child did not move, but continued his owl-eyed gaze down the road.

"Rosemary has soft knees," he said.

"If you like, *I* will sit in your lap," said the Infant Samuel from the other side of Mr. Brewster, to save the old gentleman's knees from being too downcast over the comparison.

He was six years old and betrayed by Time. Hospitable laps were not so plentiful as in the Golden Age. He could not take a lap, or leave it alone, with the old careless ease. He would lean against a lap waiting patiently for an invitation to mount. If nothing came of it, he would go away, covering his retreat with an air of great haste to some pressing business. But this manœuvre was more to spare the lap a late repentance than his own feeling of rejection. He had a sense of other people's distresses almost uncanny in so young a creature. Continually bumping into people, as when he rammed his mother's shins with his velocipede, knocking things over, spilling, smashing, from natural ineptitude, his alabaster face was oftenest seen in a state of divine remorse, like that of a child Christ weeping over world sorrows that he himself had occasioned.

The Old Baby, on the other hand, was uncontaminated by spiritual disorders. He was of a practical turn and gave a great deal of time to teaching little chickens to climb trees and sailing things in bowls or bathtubs, objects that were understood to be men-of-war, arks, whales, or corpses.

"She'll be asking who put so many flowers in the house," said Maidie. "And we'll have to tell her you did."

"Couldn't she think it was your father?" asked Jackie.

"How could she when he's been away by the hospital for days?" said Matthew. "You haven't got as much logic as Rosemary."

"I don't think she's got anything like that," rejoined Maidie. "She just holds the baby and invents wonderful things while Father makes sermons and waits."

"What does he wait for?" asked Matthew ironically.

"Her," said the Infant Samuel.

"I don't believe Rosemary's inventing every day," said Matthew. "Sometimes her mind's a blank like St. John's, so the Apocalypse can get in."

"Yes, people don't have to be inventing all the time," returned Maidie. "Part of the time their brains can be dwelling."

"Dwelling on what?" asked old Mr. Brewster, as if he had been accused.

"Just dwelling."

"Pity Rosemary should have given up her singing," the old gentleman went on. "I used to make a great point of carrying a little shawl to put around her throat in case of a draught."

"It's a dog's life being a singer," said Matthew. "You're never allowed to catch cold."

"Rosemary's allowed," put in the Infant Samuel proudly. "She can be sick in bed as much as she wants to, as long as she takes the baby in too."

"In my opinion, it was a beautiful voice, a unique, a very remarkable instance of—what do you call it?" pursued old Mr. Brewster. "I remember her singing a sort of obbligato—inventing it—to Windsor's playing of the Rhapsodie Hongroise."

"That's the tune she walks like," said the Infant Samuel.

"It was before you went to the war, Jackie," continued the old gentleman. "I remember her face reminded me of something I had seen when I was quite a boy. I don't recall exactly what. . . ."

"I don't believe she's coming home to-night. We haven't heard from Father," said Matthew.

"Oh, yes, she is," said Jackie, looking at his watch. "Didn't I tell you I felt the warmth along the road?"

"My memory is quite extraordinary for a man of my years," said old Mr. Brewster. "Names escape me, but faces remain singularly clear. I can remember her face, though I haven't seen it for thirty years."

The children looked at each other.

"There she comes!"

They all stood up full of excitement, and the old man's bleak eyes trembled down the length of the road.

"No, it's the wrong kind of car," said Matthew. It was a long, squarish closed black vehicle that went rapidly by them in the dusk.

"But that's Father! . . . Father! Father!" cried the children, bewildered.

It was their father, but he did not see them or hear them. He was nothing more than a heap huddled beside the driver.

With a frightful explosion of inarticulate sound Jackie was after the hearse, running with all his might in the dust.

"Come back! It isn't her!" The Infant Samuel was shouting after him. "It isn't her! It's the wrong kind of car!"

CHAPTER XLIII GHOSTS IN THE ROAD, AND GRAVE TIDINGS FOOLISHLY TOLD

As Windsor descended the mountain his fever must have amounted to a degree of delirium, for he had a curious illusion. The driver was very much perturbed by his fare's constantly touching him and crying out that there was someone in the middle of the road.

For Windsor there was. And no sooner had the car run over him, than there again in the middle of the road stood Owen Tredegar. At last Windsor sank into a doze, and the driver made unimpeded progress, peacefully running down as many erect dead Tredegars as there might happen to block the way. He was passing the Dead Lake, which lived abnormally with a multitude of tall reflections, when Windsor woke again with a still more tortured cry, for instead of Tredegar it was Rosemary standing in the road.

The driver could bear no more, but deposited Windsor bag and baggage in a peasant's house by the wayside. Here he was put to bed for days and burned his fever out.

When he got cool again, something strange had happened to him. He put foot to earth with bravura. Still tottering, he, nevertheless, walked in a new way. He reposed and practised this new manner of walking for a few days more; then, gathering himself and his impedimenta, he returned to Cortina in an ox cart, lying on a bed of straw, inviting mountains.

He had not sent an announcement of his return before, for he was afraid Helga might run, and he was fixed on her running no more. He was labouring with all the power of his new soul to gather into himself, to fasten in the inmost of himself what the dead Rosemary seemed to be conveying.

It was not in him to believe that her spirit had really stood there in the middle of the road to block his flight. That image, with those of the recurring Tredegar, had been, of course, the creatures of his growing delirium. Nevertheless, he felt that to the end of his days that would be his latest memory of Rosemary . . . standing in the middle of the wild road between chasms, conveying something to him out of her beautiful dead brain.

He had still been lying in the peasant's bed when, feeling in the pocket of his hanging coat for the first cigarette, he found the two letters from the town by the river, one from Mrs. Worthington and one from Giulietta. He did not know how long they had lain there before his retreat from the heights. The letter of the right little, tight little woman conveyed the news of Rosemary's death, but not at first. It was finished at a later date; the beginning, written before that heavy event, ran:

> YOU TWO WRETCHES:
>
> Oh, what a fall was there! (I call it a fall by courtesy of course.) I shouldn't be saying a word to you, you're so horribly immoral, and me a mother. But it's pure charity (beside the fun of it), for I don't believe there's another soul in the town that would fling you a bone, you sad dogs! (Giulia, of course, will, when she feels better. She ain't got no orthodoxy, more shame to her, as Michael says.)
>
> So, if you don't actually *prefer* immorality, you can give it up any time you like now, and get decently married and God-fearing and tiresome and mild, pure and bright.
>
> Of course, you'll have received the news that Sylvia's got her marriage annulled, which is more ladylike than getting divorced. Though she had to tell *why!!!* . . . And she blushed so nicely. They don't blush so well when they have anything to blush for. . . . And everybody knows now how hard-hearted Windy was. And the whole town's agog. We all thought she wasn't having babies because of the furniture.

> There's some fun in the foregoing, but not a bit about this: Rosemary's in hospital, and it's her own doing. . . . Of course, George was going crazy with all those babies and debts and she four months that way again. So she tried . . . (all alone, of course). She was desperate and didn't think that women can die of it. "And she a minister's wife," says Letitia Copeland. "If we can't look *there* for morality, where can we?"

The next part of this letter was written some days later:

> Giulia says you've got to bring Helga back to help us bear this. God forgive me for a flippant old flip, *Rosemary is dead*. And, oh, my dears, Sylvia's going to marry poor George (not immediately). She proposed it herself, the fierce little feather duster! To take care of the children, of *course*. She's that noble! And the children all at sixes and sevens in the wretched house.
>
> And when she proposed, *George drove her out of the house*. I saw it with these very eyes . . . actually *driving* her out as if she were a wolf.
>
> He was sobbing and crying, with the tears running down his face. And when she had gone, he threw himself down on the ground in the garden, and stayed there till all the children came out—and sat around him like a brood of deserted little chickens and cried their hearts out. I was so frightened. I was just screwing up my courage to go to the rescue—the baby was crawling off in the grass and screeching—when he rolled over and gathered them into his arms and went into the house. Then he ran off and made a vow of celibacy on Rosemary's grave.
>
> However, Sylvia kept at it—always for the children's sake—and he's consented to a marriage. But *not a marriage*. Poor Sylvia has no luck. She's doomed to go down to her grave unspotted from the world.
>
> And the cream of it is—that it should be *twice*. For you can tell by George's face that he will never relent. He's *ghastly*. He that took his meals so hearty and looked so hale and buxom is a father of the desert, an emaciated anchorite *with gray hair*. I don't see how I can write about it so lightly. I'm really terribly touched. Worse than I can say. He *never looks at Sylvia*. But she holds out! And the children are tidied within an inch of their lives. But they're fond of her, though. They've been so forlorn. And they're used to her. She always spent half her time there undressing and dressing them. No child was safe for a minute in his clothes. They used to hang onto their buttons in desperation when they saw her coming.
>
> She'll take them all to Windy's big house. She's got the baby and the smallest boy there now (and they can be *so* small). And

Windy's mother will be delighted. She's so fond of company to save crumbs for. God save the Chippendale!

Giulia's going to be as much married to the Reverend George as Sylvia. She got well at once and has taken on the children as she never did her own calf.

The town's all broken up. Helga's got to come back, so there'll be *something* to laugh at. [When Windsor later showed this to Helga, she said, "Yes, yes, I'll go, I'll go!"] No offence intended, none took, I 'opes.

As for Rosemary, well, my dears, we'll never be the same again. Don't mention it to anyone, but poor George let it out that he had . . . well, said *something* to her about her having so many babies. So he thinks he drove her to it. The poor wretch! The wives of saints always did have large families in New England. The Lord blesses the latter so frightfully. Take Worthington . . . [The writer had scratched out these words, thinking better of it, and gone on]:

As for vows of celibacy after the fact—a stitch of celibacy in time never hurt saint or sinner.

Mrs. Johnson has flown the coop. She says it was enough to put up with Helga's ways "without her morals cropping out." Michael is wild with glee. He's got the place all spick and span for you and says he's going to run it alone with Mrs. Chick.

Old Mr. Brewster seems to have lapsed into a "cosmic" or "comic state," (as my little Johnny says, perhaps with "comatose" in mind). Nobody knows what to think about Jackie. You know how he loathed the Reverend George. *Well, he almost carried him from the graveyard in his arms.* They're as thick as thie—ologians. But it's awful to look at their poor faces! For Heaven's sake, get married and come home!

The other letter was from Giulietta to Helga, though enclosed in an envelope addressed to Windsor. It ran:

Dear Mrs. Tredegar:

He's not my father. Giulia handed me that yarn to keep you from taking him away from poor old Sylvia and tipping over the entire town. But that little egg has decided to do the tipping herself. Crumby idea of Giulia's, but she meant well. And that's that.

She almost croaked me with her tale, but we got more pally than we'd ever been when she cried on me when she said it wasn't true, so I've got to stick to her on that account. She's the most beautiful bird on earth, anyway, and you and Rosemary are next. *Was,* I mean, for her. I can't talk about Rosemary. My

> heart's broken to scraps, but I'd rather have you come back with the Arabian Knight than not come back at all.
>
> Why is annulling a marriage more religious than divorcing?
>
> When you come back, don't talk so beautifully about everything. That gets you in Dutch. I mean, don't harp on legs and everything else being magnificent. It gets everybody nervous. Take that tip and you'll come out all right.
>
> I'm off of husbands for good, Arabians or regular fellows, and that's that. I'll dedicate my future to automobiles, aëroplanes, and swimming. Got a cup for that at Girls' Camp this summer. Dad has certainly been good to Giulia while she was laid up. Never bothered her, of course, but handy, and *presents!* Rubies! Pearls! Cripes! But she kept saying she'd rather have Mrs. Tredegar, and Dad said if Windy didn't bring you back in a hurry he'd be after you himself with a warrant.
>
> I hope somebody else has written you about Rosemary. I can't and that's that.
>
> Well, be good to yourself.
>
> Yours. etc.,
>
> GIULIETTA.
>
> P. S. If it weren't for Dad and Giulia, I'd pick on you and the Knight for parents. But I'm all off grown-ups and their fancy ways. Hope I'm a mental defective and stay a brat *ad infinitum.*

Windsor, lying on his straw bed in the oxcart, mounting toward Cortina, reread these letters and decided not to show either to Helga, nor to tell her of Rosemary's death until he could make sure that all would be well with her. He mourned for Jackie and for Rosemary.

There must not be two women lost, not *two.* He girded his soul.

LAST CHAPTER THE JUDGMENT OF THE DUST

I'LL be safe as the bird in the nest. You'll see," she said.

And for the first time Windsor saw the face of his Helga when she was lying. It was a different thing from that sly look he had seen when she was haggling over the price of the motor car in which he had gone down the mountain. Any saint that journeys much might have acquired that look from counting what the agents of journeys leave in a poor wallet. This was a wickeder slyness.

"I think until now I've been a sick man, perhaps ever since I did that fool trick to my arm," said Windsor trying to persuade that look out of her narrow eyes. "But I want you to see that now I am well. You will trust me then."

"With my life, with my life, with my life!"

"Can't you see how I have come through, my Dear-to-heaven?" he said. "See how strong and cool I am. I'm going to clothe you in my right mind."

He had the serenity of his old smile, enriched with new strength and a power of tenderness that amazed himself. She looked at him curiously, sidelong, then closed her eyes and almost imperceptibly shook her head. When she lifted her lids again she had turned away toward Tofana.

"Listen, Dear-to-heaven," he persisted. "Rosemary came to me in a dream and told me about love. . . . She trusts me. And so must you."

"A lame angel from the lap of God made a fool of the bo'sun's daughter," returned Helga. "Wary, wary in the wind's eye! . . . Oh, yes, yes, I will trust you as the lamb trusts the shepherd," she ended with the lying look.

"Look at me, Helga. Don't you notice any change? I have never been like this before. Lying down there I tested love with fire. Now, tempered like a Damascus blade, perfect love has cast out fear."

"The steelsmiths forge Damascus grief that never rusts."

"Helga, look at me."

She did not turn to him at once, but at last, as if the command had tardily reached her, she examined him again with hooded eyes. "The eagle is returned to his empty nest," she said. "He is sprouting horns and an Apocalypse of plumage. His horns are full of sap. His horns blow, his wings beat and batter. His smile is so heartrending sweet, a fool might think he was a villain. By God, I look on apotheosis! . . . All the saints are out to see the show, and there is hullabaloo in heaven. . . . But he is a carrion eagle, for his beak is in love with dead women."

"Helga, under the power of this vision, I command you to use your wits on me," he said.

"Yes, yes, wits, wits, we need wits. Up, my buckies! Pipe all hands!"

"Helga, I absolutely implore you not to talk like that!" he protested.

"Inopportune angels are worse than hornets in a busy house. . . . Raphael, the Affable Angel, your coming is irrelevant."

"What do you mean exactly, Helga?"

Again the honour of her Doric face was lost in that sly look.

"The sons of light, the sneaks of heaven, were always notable for prying on the devices of the damned. But Lucifer has cellars for his makeshifts."

"Helga, what were you intending to do?" he asked, with growing anxiety.

"Intending? Oh, yes, your mercurial eye believes it caught me intending. But your mercury is no match for my mineral! . . . Still, at last, with whips enough, even basalt is worn to rags."

"Helga! You did not mean . . . to *die!*"

"Carry dying to the Newcastle of death! Who's the fool now? . . . There is a great lady in Ireland, a lamb's daughter. I wrote her my farewell and said I was about to join myself to a certain order of religious who take an oath of silence."

This was on Windsor's return to Cortina from the scene of his final illness below. He had found Helga sitting in the field there, precisely where he had left her ten days before. She looked very strange, and now when he lifted her from the ground she behaved as if she were stiff from remaining long in one position.

"You look as if you hadn't budged since I went away," he said, after he had told her of his illness and pointed to his retreating ox cart which, having deposited him and his effects at the hotel, was already moving off with impassive deliberation toward the gigantic portal of the valley.

"Have you been sitting there all this time?" he asked.

"I don't know."

When he took hold of her, she shrank as if he had touched a bruise. "What! Did I hurt you?" he cried out.

"The fiend that singed his tail in Beelezebub's bonfire squeaks like a mouse at a farthing candle."

"Helga, come, yourself, into my arms, if I hurt you when I touch you. You said you were my woolly child."

"The lame eagle is a great gentleman, but he beaks his own child. . . . Don't let the dead lamb know, nor the black wanderer get wind of this. Mum's the word."

They had been mounting the long undulations of the fields toward Tofana. There had been a wild storm in the night, and the mountain had a new scar. A cyclopean sword had ripped one of its towers from top to base. The mountains' gray blood streamed abroad in a long swath, descending to the green that furred his robe. New-fallen boulders lay among shattered trees. There had been added another long track of mountain dust, which on these heights gleamed light, deceiving the eye with an impression of snow in summer, though the real snow higher up dazzled away the deceit. Helga scarcely ever turned her wild eyes from the mountain.

Windsor tried not to let her see how he observed that wildness and how he was beating about within himself, marshalling all his new strength for means to succour her.

He tried to hold himself from despair for having brought her to this extremity. How he had raved at her before the final brutality of his going! And now the raved at had become the raving. The brave basalt of the heart had given way at last. Her brow was hot, but she was very pale. Drops of moisture wet the edges of her hair *léonato,* lion-coloured. A braid had got loose and hung to her shoulder in a loop. Her breast was visible where her dress had not been properly buttoned. He fastened it. One stocking was down about her ankle. He pulled it up and gartered it with a handkerchief.

Sometimes she would turn on him as he spoke almost a look of madness, and sometimes for a moment there would be the relief of her old clear considering gaze.

"But you said I had always fatigued you," she said. "And though you have changed, I have not ordered anew my qualities that make you sick. My mould, such as it is, has no hope of change. Thus have my vicissitudes disposed me. And a kind of obtuseness seals me so. I should always fatigue you."

"A man condemned to death looks back on the fatigues of life as a holiday," he argued. "Your loss was my condemnation to death. I looked back, my Holiday."

"To that summer long ago," she resumed. "A threatened ox would rather pull than die."

"Put it so, if you like, my Holiday. . . . You said we had not had a 'valid joy.' But looking through the clear eyes of loss, I know now that no matter what are its conditions, your existence is for me a valid joy."

"It is hard to make these things clear," said she, shuddering under his hand. "It takes some fire even to explain the cold."

"You said 'a valid joy could trick old tricky death,' " he persisted.

It was when Windsor touched Helga that she grew more troubled. It was as if the frustrated joy of her body, the defeated passion, had not died but been metamorphosed into living pain. Where before her fabric had been shot with bliss under his hand, now that impact stung.

She shuddered now as he took her in his arms.

"No, no, you can't hew a hearthstone out of the angry brine," she said. "I pity you, but I've had so much of this pity I'm gorged. Sharks, I say, sharks yawning for pity . . . waiting sidelong under green water. It's wolfish, this life everywhere the same, the same wolf. . . . Did I think this a fairy world? Love undone . . . there are people back there whose presence is exile. I twig the thing, the going on, innocent of wonder, unscathed by daring. . . . The too easy, graceful ugly life afraid of a creaking door. Clothed. . . . How could you stomach the size of a naked heart, you squatlings! I don't listen to your complaints. I don't listen at all. You hanged Tredegar as high as Haman, for a dead lamb. . . . I don't listen at all for hearing wilder music, the music that is the drum of love and death. . . . Plenty of death, you know. . . . I come from other places. . . ."

He dared not touch her. It had been the touch that sent her into this frenzy. He watched her wild eyes, while he exerted his will not to founder in pity and remorse.

"Heave anchor! Out of this!" she went on. "Groans the old ship, urged out anew. . . . Love undone. . . . The winds are young. They have no kind interlacing with old rigging. I mean they have no sorrow for portless ships. . . . Islands, I say, islands for hiding. Caverns for the dear, the too beautiful, dastard, hunted head! . . . They love a shining mark, these hounds! . . . But mountains for dead women."

She stared at Windsor.

"Have you any sting left? . . . God, the hunter, is hunting us all. Rumours and portents! . . . your eyebrows are wringing their hands. No, I'm befuddled. Tons of sea! . . . *Glissons!* . . . Let it pass!"

She stopped, for Windsor had unwittingly done perhaps the one thing that could have impeded that flow. He had burst into tears.

"Listen, Sweet Fellow," she asked, "don't you think it would be more handy for you if I were dead?"

"No, no, even so you are my valid joy."

She became sedulous and quiet. They ascended past the grass to the trees that furred the bottom of Tofana's robe. She was careful of him, like one looking back to see if the limper can keep up. She would interrupt herself, starting to speak, and say, "No, no, let's not feel that. Let's not feel anything any more."

He gave himself to persuasions, to convincing her of his love. But still he saw the lurking unbelief. When she spoke the softest, she seemed the most unconvinced.

"Will it take a whole life to make you trust me again?" he brought out. "Look, we have lived it. . . . Don't you feel that an entire life has passed in this hour? And see how faithful we have been!"

"Oh, we have been faithful."

"And you won't be afraid of me any more?" he asked.

She shook her head, with hooded eyes.

"There won't be time enough for me to betray you after such a long life," he said.

"No, no, there won't be time enough, Sweet Fellow."

Now they were above the heads of the serried fir trees. But she was pressing on into the mountain dust that heaped the ascent.

"Tredegar told me not to let you go too close to Tofana," he said, wondering a little that the name gave him no pang. That folly had been burnt out of him with all the rest.

"Old Tredegar has said his say," Helga returned and in her turn burst into tears. She let Windsor take her into his breast. "The fiend is off my back. My back is cold," she said.

"I am going to clothe you in my right mind," he repeated.

"I am cold, but not cold enough. It stings."

"Tredegar said that when I was waked I would be dangerous," Windsor breathed against her throat once more. "I am awake and dangerous now."

"You are not dangerous enough."

"Now I am a murderer too," he persisted. "I have murdered you as surely as if I had pushed you over a cliff . . . you must have a murderer to keep you warm. And I am fit for you at last. Come, my Holiday. Let me fold in your ghost."

They had come to a roaring torrent, still raging at the rain that had gorged it in the night.

"I must go a little nearer to the roar," she said. "While you were gone I betrayed you with a mountain. . . . He sees us both. He knows that I have come, and he is filled with cavernous joy. He is calling me. Come higher, I want more of the howls of this mountain. . . . But you are too fragile."

"I shall never be fragile any more," he returned. "I am stalwart with perfect love. I have tested my heart with howls."

"You don't look at the mountain, you only look at me," she complained, as if she wanted to shake off his eyes.

"Helga, I cannot look enough. A life is not enough for this looking, those few miserable moments that we call a life. I'm oppressed with haste. I'm panting as I look."

She turned her face away.

"Oh, my Dear-to-heaven, won't you lean on me again?"

"Oh, I'll lean, I'll lean," she said hastily and falsely. "It will soon begin. You'll see." Presently she added, "I have wondered if we were meant to fasten on each other with all this love. If there is anything in Nature that really compels it."

"Do you want a scalding truth?" he rejoined. "It is compelled. It is the one thing needful."

He made her lie down on the bank of the torrent where there was a bed of ferns. He wanted to make her rest. He lay down beside her and pillowed her head on his arm. But though she yielded, it was like the yielding of a trapped hare that is soft but furtive in one's arms.

"No, don't turn your face away or I will starve to death," he said. She obeyed but closed her eyes.

"Are you going to be soft and quiet?"

"Yes, so soft!" she returned with that faintly false note in her voice. "You'll see, Sweet Fellow. My heart will be so quiet. The old good toughness will resume my heart. . . . We shall be as before." A shudder went through all her length.

"Let's go and live in your house," said he. "It's the best house of all."

"Well, I always said it was the most commodious house," she returned. "With a river running through all the rooms. . . . And you can establish your books there like gladiators."

"We shall establish everything there, including this, my Wandering Dew."

She did not smile.

"And do you think we shall have some peace there?" he asked.

"No," she returned. "But we shall have some bliss."

He saw that she was not speaking truly, but he laughed.

"I did want a bit of peace. But I'll try to worry through with bliss. And I need a daily river of you. . . . You see, I came from such dry places, Helga, that I had to be drowned before I could be at home in your torrents."

"And now are you drowned enough?"

"Drowned enough," he answered. "I never again could be even mildly at home out of a torrent."

"We shall have barns and peacocks, wheat and bees. Perhaps an antelope," she said, still with closed eyes. "Also Blinko, Little David, and Mrs. Chick, with hopping baby. I shall feed the downy ones, and Michael will feed the cocks and pecking mothers. . . . You will keep the calves and pigeons. And I shall have a hardy heart. . . . When the room is yellow with lamps, the outside at evening burns blue in windows. We shall listen to the river all day long splashing in the lips of the Ethiopian. But that river will not have a lion in its throat like this."

"And we must take care of Rosemary's children," said Windsor, forgetting in the drowse that he had not yet told Helga of that death. "Sylvia mustn't have it all her own way."

"Sylvia may go to the devil in her own way. He will not bother to put that penny in his pocket," said Helga. "Oh, yes, we shall take the best of care of all children and carry the hearts of Rosemary, Giulia, and Jackie."

She gave the liar's sigh. "Those flowers by your hand are vetches. In England they call them pig's-trotters."

"You shall be poetry again upon the town, just as Rosemary said. . . . I think we are falling asleep, my Dear-to-heaven." Windsor took pleasure in this name for her that he had made that day. "Sleep while I wrap you."

"Yes. Turn away from Tofana and sleep," she murmured.

"Sleep once more . . . You mustn't look too long at anything, or it will grow too small. Even a mountain cannot bear the look. It will go under. But when we wake, Tofana will heave up again and answer."

With infinite solicitude Windsor eased his trapped hare in the curve of his body. Her head sank, more submissive, on his arm along which lay the loosened braids. The ferns made good bedding, and the torrent sang well. He heard her breathing change. Her hands uncurled.

Drowse was on him too, but he would not release the sentinels of his soul from their watch. His sentinels were pacing at the door of the woman asleep while his soul made a mute and potent argument to hers.

"I will seize you. While you are asleep I will take the town. Your sleeping heart will forget to man its walls . . . when you have forgotten your reasons, I will take your heart like a newborn lamb, a woolly child. I will persuade it. I twig your plan. You meant to give up the ghost, here on Tofana, to still your incomparable tongue and put the quietus on your hardy heart. But I say it is too good a ghost to give up. Not yet. *Pacienza.*

"How did you stick it before when things were worse? I swear to you I will not be worse than what you had before. . . .

"What do I offer you? I offer you blind hope . . . with this belated, full-fledged love to keep it blind. I will nourish your blindness with exorbitant love, engined with sexual fire. I will deliver you to the old spell, the incantation, the *inganno,* to the hope that is in tunes, the hope without reason that imbeds the roots of life.

"You will be among the blindfold that believe in to-morrow . . . and I, the lame priest of your blindness, lame but a priest. And you will put your trust in me, the defaulter. . . . And your beautiful reprieved ghost will know the bliss of gratitude, counting its days. It is harder to live than to die, my Dear-to-heaven, but you were made for hard conditions. I summon you back to the hardest, to the exploit of further living, the hero's hardihood of joy without security. And I will lead you to your barns and wheat and bees, and at evening your antelope will look through blue windows into the lighted room."

And as if Helga heard him, sleeping she hoped in sleep. In her sleep she took up hope. With a profound sigh she turned her head so that her unlying lips were against his. Then he let his own soul give up its sentinel's pace. His convalescent body took account of the long strain of the day. He went into such a stony sleep that he did not know she had left his lips, got out of his arms, and gone.

But presently the loss pierced in. He sprang up and stared about. Then he saw her running and dancing higher up along the stream of mountain dust that had gushed down under the tempest in the night. She was rejoicing, laughing, beckoning, calling, inviting him into her arms. He saw the thing had happened while she slept in his bosom. She had recovered heart. Above her hung a scarred donjon of rock that seemed to keep its footing by a hair. He shouted to her, but the torrent made his shout a silence. He ran.

Then, as if the feather touch of their little feet had set in train atoms of precarious dust whose multitude held up a monster, there was movement in the flank of the mountain. Above the torrent's howl a sound of cracking hissed over them, sharp as lightning, and the battered donjon slid and crashed.

The ponderous mass went down with boiling detonations to the right of where Windsor was running; down, down, grinding its path to powder, beating itself to fragments and to dust, resting in angry smoking rest at last, among the massacred trees.

The air was filled with welter of mountain dust. It caught the light and quenched it into gray. Slowly it settled on the ruined slope. A silky surface was over all the slope.

Windsor ran, stumbling in the thick pounded stuff of mountains crying, crying, his convulsed face streaming with tears. His open mouth was full of salt and dust.

It seemed to him that he had reached the spot, but how to know in that place of even gray? He crawled on hands and knees inquiring of the dust. . . . Was this a mound, this silky elevation in the pounded even dust?

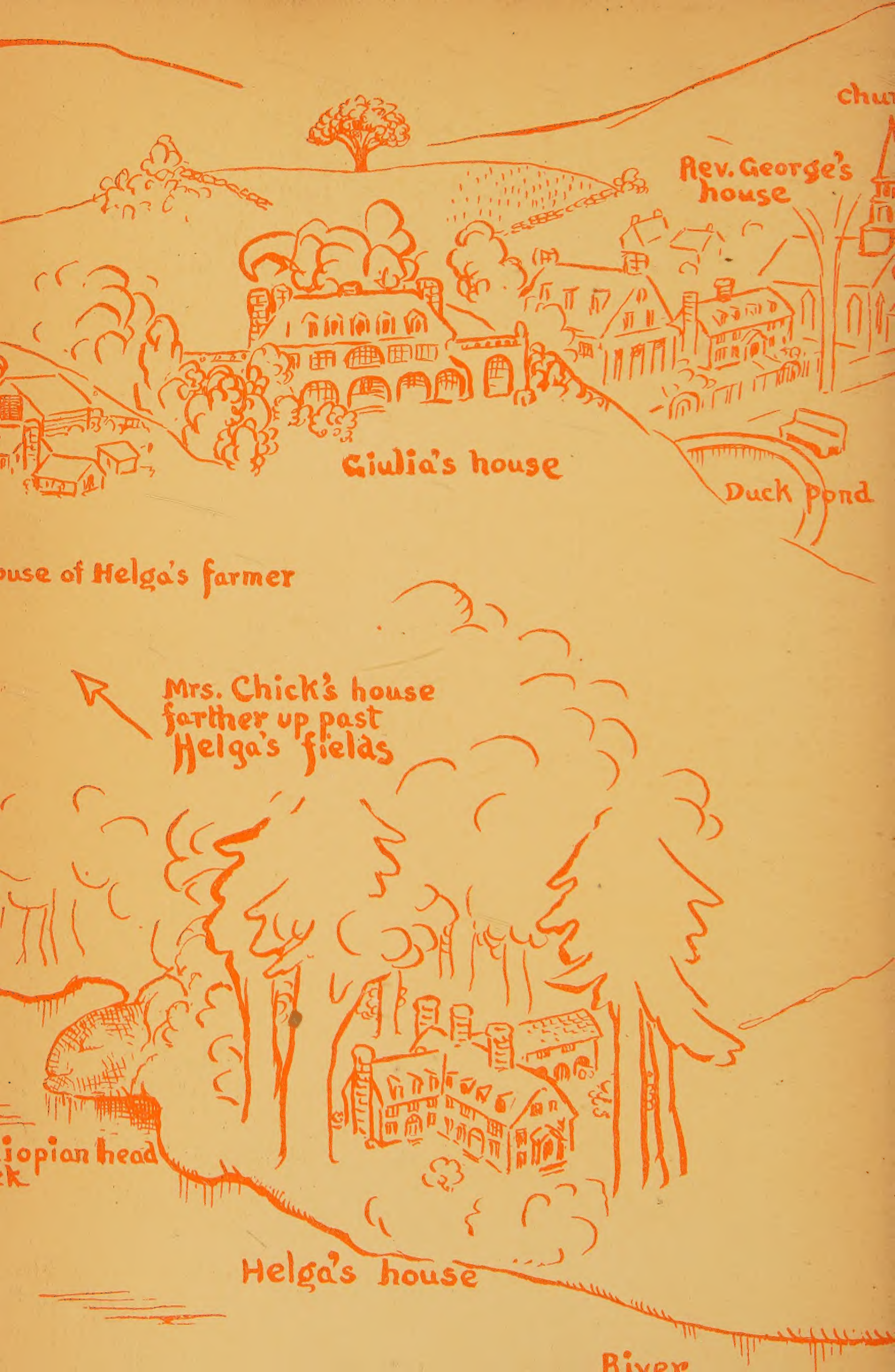
He stared and then gave out a howl inhuman as a wolf. The dust was quivering with vibration from in under. There was a palpitation in the even dust. He dug like a dog in the still smoking dust.

It was she. The miracle was there. He dragged her out, howling with inhuman laughter, his tears still running. The dust fell off her, the soft pounded dust, such as might have closed the mouths, the eyes, the ears, the nostrils of Pompeii. The dust fell out of her ears, her lips, her eye sockets. He shook the soft powdered stuff of Tofana off her garments. He felt, he shook, he tested her from head to foot. He kissed the dust off from her face, her bosom, her throat, her knees.

And they were laughing all the time, while he shouted at the mountain:

"A valid joy! A valid joy!"

THE END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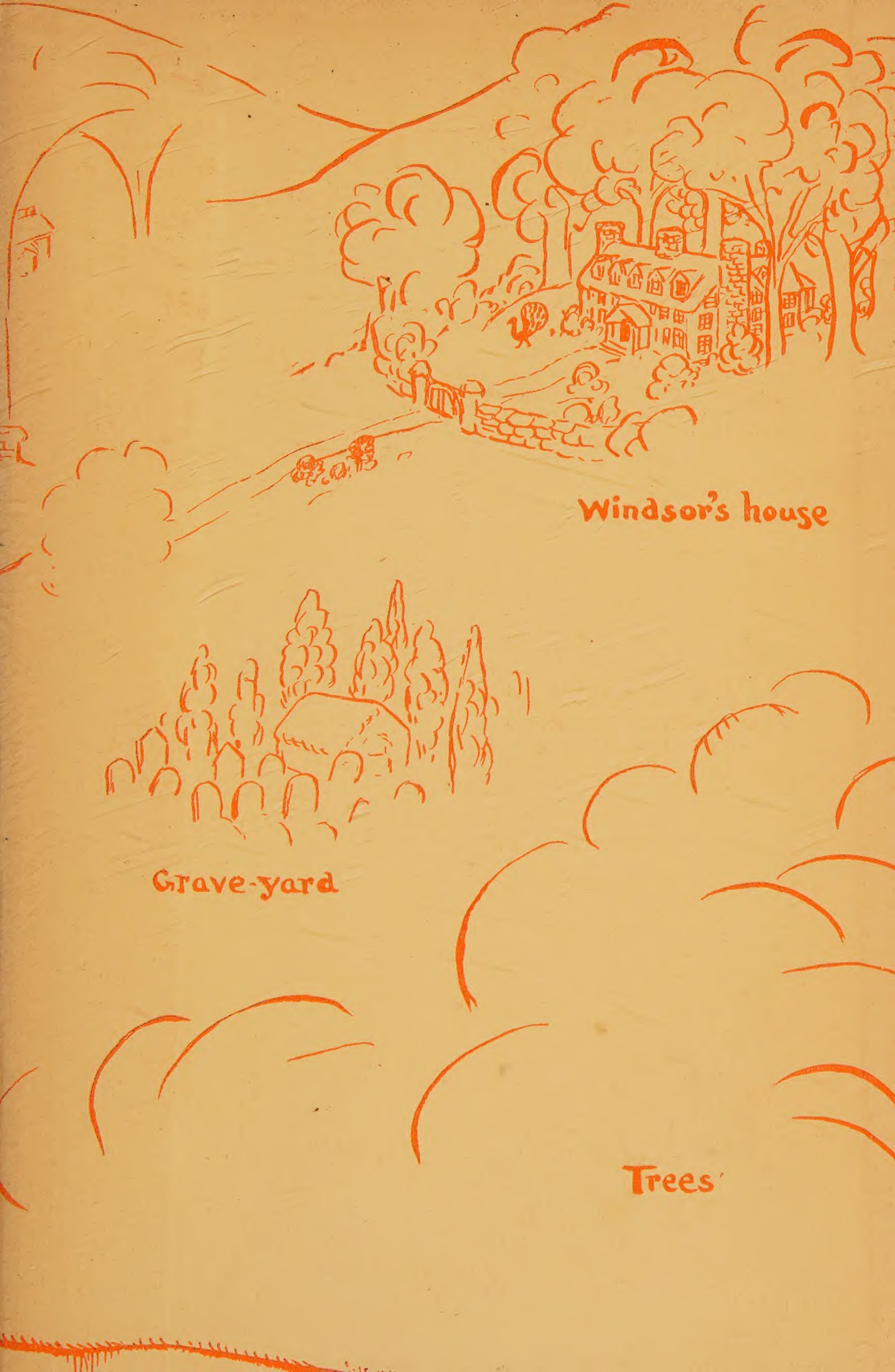
Windsor's house
Grave-yard
Trees